

**SEA CHANGE, KNOW FISH: CATCHING THE TALES OF FISH AND MEN IN  
CORDOVA, ALASKA**

By

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## Abstract

Cordova, Alaska is a coastal community in Southcentral Alaska with an intricate history in commercial fishing, primarily for the Copper River sockeye salmon industry, which extends historically to pre-statehood.

This dissertation collects personal narratives as a method to express cultural features of community identity and the role salmon has played in shaping identity, livelihood, and lifestyle in Cordova, Alaska. Research material is based on oral history interviews from which I construct written character portraits to depict aspects of resident life in this fishing community and from others who use the community to access summer salmon resources of the Copper River. Portraits were performed and presented in public venues to obtain casual feedback from and review by community members from Cordova and other participants in the Prince William Sound drift fishery. The portraits and public commentary post-performance or from community readers serve as one basis for analysis and lead to my conclusions about life in this community and, on a larger scale, cultural dimensions common within other communities (either geographic or occupational).

Public performances offer a communication tool that provides a method to share differences within the industry without encountering explicit controversy over challenging industry transitions. Although the tool of storytelling does not typically receive significant media or policy attention, I find it very effective in understanding and mediating conflict across different groups of people, especially when the main theme of conflict, sustainability and access to the fishery resource, is a mutual cultural feature of interest to diverse participant groups. Additionally, public creative performances offer a venue of communication primarily designed for entertainment and as a result, the audience interaction with storytellers occurs more

casually and perhaps more genuinely than it does in academic conferences or policy meeting venues.

Personal stories related to the iconic feature of salmon with mutual significance in state and federal fisheries of the North Pacific are a valuable, intimate source of local and traditional knowledge. The opportunity to put meaningful and commonly shared emphasis on the fish as an economic and cultural resource and not on a particular stakeholder group may help lead to improved communications in a field that tends to illicit conflict in consideration of access to harvest rights.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Ken Jones. He was lost in a kayak accident in Kachemak Bay in 2017. I contribute much of my interest, appreciation, awareness and general understanding of commercial fishing and the rich culture within in it to what I observed and gained from him in my early time on deck of waters across the Gulf of Alaska. I expect gathering and sharing stories from the industry to remain a part of my mission forever.



## Chapter 1 Introduction

This dissertation explores cultural components of community identity and the roles Copper River sockeye salmon contribute to the lives of residents in the community of Cordova, Alaska and to the occupational community of fishermen who hold a permit for the Prince William Sound drift fishery. It is an interdisciplinary, qualitative work that has three distinct components:

1. Learning and applying the tools of oral history through interviewing, participant observation and site visitation in the physical community of Cordova and on-board vessels participating in the Copper River salmon fishery.
2. The narratives collected from the first dimension were revised into a series of nonfiction portraits to portray individual characters that reflect various aspects of community life.
3. Public performances through staged readings of the narratives were applied to offer a facilitated communication tool that provided additional listeners, not necessarily primary interviewees, and an opportunity for others to hear and respond to the community portraits.

The original intention for this project was to consider community identity through the vision of residents (both year-round and seasonal). Interviews were not structured to focus solely on a full description of the salmon industry but rather on the role of the fishery in the community. In creating the specific interview questions (available as Appendix B: General Interview Topics and Questions), I did not intend to direct interviewees solely in discussion of the salmon industry. However, it was the topic that most frequently emerged.

In most cases, I let discussions flow through natural, conversational currents. It was inevitable that my personal experience and upbringing in the Alaska commercial fishing industry influenced the dialogue. Originally, I chose the community of Cordova as my focus specifically

because it was a Gulf of Alaska coastal community where I had not spent significant time or participated directly with the drift-fleet (for further description, details and definition of “drift-fleet” see Chapter 4: Prince William Sound Salmon: Ecology, Humans, Fisheries). Still, extended experience in several other Alaska fisheries did effect reflexive involvement with the individuals interviewed more than originally anticipated. Lifestyle familiarity facilitated an ease of communication and led to a more intimate awareness of life in the community, a sense of distilled formality.

### 1.1 Conceptual Intentions

When I began the project with the National Science Foundation’s Resilience and Adaptation Integrated Graduate Education Research and Training Program, the intention was to explore the importance of recognizing varied dimensions of community and to consider that community sustainability, as it pertains to the human dimensions of commercial marine resources in the North Pacific, can be fragile and adaptation is unavoidable. Transitions in the environment, in the dimension of marketing and in harvest technologies have lead and will inevitably lead to future transitions in industry management. Marine occupations that bring substantial income and identity to Gulf of Alaska port communities are so fundamental that those involved in the industry tend to avoid discussion of “what happens if (or when) things change?” Industry participants are typically pleased with the opportunities the state of Alaska provides for them and relatively few fishermen engage in management related events such as an Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting where policy decisions are made. If there is a policy or political

issue that may be problematic, group organizations (such as United Fishermen of Alaska<sup>1</sup>) will strongly encourage fishermen to participate in opportunities to testify. Granted, this is an anecdotal reflection but in consideration of fleet commentaries in their occupational setting and in observation of their active participation at policy meetings, I believe there is a communication difference considering fleet goals, common behaviors and seasonal expectations compared to how management agencies address what the fleet identity entails and how it changes over time.

The manner in which fishermen express priorities, goals, values, interests--any dimension that characterizes one's active participation in an industry situation (for example: active fishing, net work and adjustments, vessel preparation and repair, shop time, on the docks) does not provide the same conversational venue as what might transpire in a more formal setting. In other words, the venue of a formal meeting and venues involved in actual fishing activities are different and the topics addressed are different as well as the way the participants in each setting communicate with each other.

One reason this is an issue is that when fully engaged in industry, participants are not likely to consider historic transitions that influenced positive and negative consequences over a longer period than the immediate state of affairs. While the current condition of the commercial salmon industry is generally considered optimistic or plentiful this has not always been the

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<sup>1</sup> Their website (<http://www.ufafish.org/member-organizations/organization-members/>) lists many gear-types and regionally specific organizations as examples of groups with political intentions.

case. Various issues have influenced the industry (on a statewide scale) in both identity and in production capabilities.

Communities with a notable history of participation in commercial fishing as an occupation and lifestyle must and do respond to transitions. The response can be adaptive; with the community fluctuating to accommodate what must change or it can be reactive; creating dimensions of challenge and constraint. Species availability and policy changes impact different groups of people in different ways.

On many occasions, the social impacts of policy change are considered on the basis of a physical community. Management agencies often use the term “fishing dependent-community” when considering the social impacts of policy change. The term “fishing-dependent” has implications related to the role that the commercial fishing industry contributes to community structure. Community can be defined as a specific zip-code location and it is often the case that the physical feature of community is a primary categorical distinction. Cordova fits this distinction—it is a physical locale and does have a large percentage of residents who participate in the Copper River fishery that is relatively close to home. However, the term “community” also has implications for human values: a shared sense of a place or significance, something more related to the internal human dimensions of identity (family, friendships, acquaintances, peers) rather than social or economic statistics.

The definition of community solely as location-based fails to consider other assemblages of people who make up the communities of interest regarding issues of commercial fisheries and the inevitable transitions. There are scenarios that occur in institutional settings where a group of fishermen—organized likely by the type of quota they hold or the type of vessel they operate—

present opinions as a consolidated interest group. These types of groups also qualify as a community. There is mutuality that pulls individuals into a socially distinct group.

On a statewide level, Alaska employment in commercial fisheries is often an exceptionally migratory occupation. Species availability and management regulations determine when stocks are open for harvest; behavior typically follows seasonal standards and those involved in harvest can be on-site even though they likely spend different parts of the year in other locations. Participation in a fishery generally means time on-board a vessel and captains and crew often regard the vessels themselves as a “home” location while the fishery is in session. Despite the time on-board a vessel, some captains and crew may also have family formally settled into a certain location and some may not. Transiency is a very real feature of the commercial fishing industry, especially in a region like the North Pacific where there are numerous opportunities to engage in state and federal fisheries throughout the year. Social dimensions that may impact this home/ homelessness consideration include: gender, age, marital and family status, income conditions, and personal preferences. Cordova is slightly unusual in this dimension because the fishing grounds are close enough to the home community to commute between the two locations, approximately two hours. In that case, if the crew is not from the local community they may still stay on the boat in the harbor during days that are not open for fishing. The number of days and quantity of hours available for fishing is dependent on the volume of fish available for harvest as determined by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). In general, an open period is around 14 hours, several times per week.

This “transiency” dimension is addressed through consideration of the Russian Old Believer fleet members. These individuals are primarily residents of small communities near Homer, Alaska but there are associated religious/ cultural communities in Oregon and elsewhere



nationally and internationally. During the summer season many fishermen come to fish the Copper River, often their families will accompany them and stay at the local campgrounds. On the other hand, when people live full time in a place such as Cordova and *can* participate in a fishery that is so close to home and family, it influences their sense of ownership or entitlement of the fishery.

This feature provides Cordova with a fishing-community perspective that is different from other similar sized communities in the state of Alaska. The interviews in this dissertation consistently demonstrate that Cordova residents hold a common opinion on local “ownership” of the fish. They are resilient to changes in the industry in the sense that as the market for salmon changed, many residents restructured how they handled and sold fish. For example, vessel holding tanks were remodeled so that fish could be stored in slush water rather than dry bags. This keeps the fish in a better quality condition for a longer period of time. Once the fish handling techniques improved, fishermen had higher quality products to sell, sometimes with independent marketing. For example, consider Paradigm Seafoods (formerly known as Gulkana Seafoods Direct, current website: <https://www.paradigmseafoods.com/>). This is owned and operated by a long-term Cordova resident who specifically indicates in his website welcoming address to customers that it is inevitable to address change in the context of fisheries. The marketing technique of fresh frozen salmon is replacing (to some extent) what used to more typically be a canned product and many prefer selling their fish that way.

## 1.2 Case Study Location: Cordova, Alaska

Cordova (estimated pop. 2,340), located near the mouth of the Copper River on the eastern side of Prince William Sound, is the closest city to the Copper River/ Bering River

commercial salmon districts. For 2015, there were 652 listings in the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission permit database (<https://www.cfec.state.ak.us/plook/#permits>) for the Prince William Sound drift gill-net sector, slightly more than half (300) of these were held by Cordova residents. For 2019, there are 602 listings, 258 held by Cordova residents. The value of this permit, currently, is approximately \$125,000 but the permit and boat are often sold in a package transaction and the cost varies. The Copper River environment can be physically turbulent with very shallow water and drift boats are relatively small vessels. The bow-pickers (drift boat style) may be as small as 26 feet but many are larger than that and are designed for potential solo operation. On this type of boat, the net is hauled up and let out from a roller on the front deck of the boat after it is guided directly over the bow between two upright metal posts. Though there are likely a few stern haul vessels remaining with the Copper River fleet, bowpickers are considered a safer alternative because of how the net returns to the main vessel and what fishermen can witness more clearly given the tidal turbulence features of the shallow marine features of the Copper River Flats compared to the drift fisheries in regions such as Bristol Bay or Cook Inlet.

On a greater historical scale, the location of the current community of Cordova holds mixed Alaska Native heritage. The central and western areas of Prince William Sound are the home region to the Native culture of referred to as Chugach Eskimo by early anthropologists<sup>2</sup>. The Eyak occupied the region from the mouth of the Copper River flats towards what is now the

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<sup>2</sup> The Native people in this region today refer to themselves as Suqpiak or Alutiiq.

location of Cordova; the Katalla site is the most north-western region of the Tlingit and finally the upper regions of the Copper River is home to the Ahtna Athabascans. For further geographic details, refer to the Alaska Native Language Center Map (<https://www.uaf.edu/anla/collections/map/anlmap.png>).

The terminus of the Copper River and Northwest Railway was established in Cordova and served as a shipping port to transport copper south across the Gulf of Alaska in 1906. The railroad carried copper ore from the Kennecott mines. Prior to the railroad, there were also salmon canneries in operation in Orca Inlet. More specific details about Alaska Native heritage and resident population, the physical and geographic location details and more specific history features are reviewed in the chapter titled “Prince William Sound Salmon: Ecology, Humans, Salmon Fisheries.”

### 1.3 Project Procedures and Modifications

The preliminary intention of the project was to use recorded interviews and transcripts as a source to find the local voice of the community of Cordova and to demonstrate the main features people discussed when they spoke about community identity. Approximately fifty interviews were recorded but not all were fully transcribed. Many that were transcribed were not recomposed into final portraits. All of the recordings and transcription notes served as a source of material to support the pieces ultimately composed.

Storytelling provides an opportunity for direct interpretation of experience. It is existence, it is the inherent multidimensionality that the human condition presents. Human beings are more than just specimens and not all the details that emerge from a single interview can be defined as independently verifiable facts. What interviewees expressed to me was dependent on many

contextual dynamics of the setting, the timing, the personal characteristics of the people interviewed and my own influence on each conversation.

The decision to use the portrait style representation rather than a more basic analysis of commentary and opinions expressed in the transcripts was a result of my academic writing experience, strongly influenced by an undergraduate degree in English and Creative Writing and supported by participation 1) in several organized FisherPoet performances and 2) in the Middlebury College Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in the summer of 2016.

The performance component, mostly through the Astoria FisherPoets Gathering, though also through personal performances in Homer, Alaska and invited readings in the communities of Cordova and Kenai are what ultimately influenced the most unique finding of the overall research: that oral history, creative writing and performance can serve as a tool to mediate and share topics across different user groups in commercial fisheries. This is aside from the preliminary conceptual framework for the study but is perhaps the most useful happenstance that will motivate me in future research.

#### 1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

This introductory chapter discusses the original conceptual framework for the dissertation and how it was modified by the unexpected and originally unplanned use of creative nonfiction writing. It also addresses the unforeseen but beneficial role of performance storytelling as a way to return findings from an interview back to the public audience and keep the material and findings more socially fresh than if an analysis were to simply remain published in the dissertation and eventually trapped in the shelves of the library.

Following this introduction is the Theoretical Framework and Research Methods chapter. The chapter presents anthropological perspectives that are reflective of how various dimensions of ethnography ultimately influenced portrait composition. It provides consideration for the role of context and time in both the initial interview and how what is expressed at one point cannot necessarily represent what may be stated in a different setting or other circumstances. This chapter also explains where interview methods stemmed from. It clarifies how the performance opportunities arose and created a beneficial way to engage audience opinions with the written narrative. The chapter also discusses writing techniques and personal observations beyond material that emerged from interviews directly. This includes: poetry, a journal collection, and a written description of a series of early 1900 photographs from the Cordova local museum.

Then, “Prince William Sound Commercial Salmon: Ecology, People, Fisheries,” provides a basic overview of the social, ecological and historical features of the Prince William Sound salmon industry and how it has influenced the community identity of Cordova, Alaska. The first part of this chapter presents background information on Prince William Sound as an evolving social-ecological system, the interplay of its biogeography, fisheries ecology, its communities, and the timeline of events that have lead up to the contemporary commercial fishing setting in the region. Details of the contemporary setting, including general operational details of commercial fisheries, are explored in part two.

“Backdrop: Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Fishing Communities” discusses the relationship between anthropology and fishing communities in three different ways: 1) social-economic dimensions pertaining to the fleet and the fishery, 2) description of a particular fishery, group of fishermen or geographic community that identifies as a fishing community and 3)

composed observations that refer to collected personal experience related to the occupation of commercial fishing.

The precise process of character portrait composition and their varied structures and influences are explained in “Creating a Community Web of Portraits,” an introduction to chapter five. This chapter clarifies some of the varied genre choices that materialized in the different portraits over time. Each individual portrait is then described briefly. The portraits in full length are not listed as individual chapters, but sub-chapters within Chapter Five.

### 1.5 Creating a Community Web

There is a single poetry composition that I hold and visualize consistently with all of the material in this dissertation. I think of it as the use of a fishing net or line, with tensions, pulls, supports coming from multiple sources. There is binding and capturing in some cases and opening, releasing in others. I think of a braid, a bowline or a clove hitch--a firm knot that influences functionality and intricate details of human relationships.

#### **Creating a Community Web**

Visualize the craft of web.

Begin with a single knot. Loop, lash and the knots form a mesh.

Meshes become a sheet.

Web is hitched to lines, corks and leads with fast,  
steady hands working through years of practice.

Measures are made by instinct.

They align it: quick, tight and just right.

Memories weave carefully.

Our nets must function as a whole.

Each knot, each vessel, each square, holds the rest of it together.

Knowledge brews--mend, repair, patch.

Reconstruction never ceases.

Sometimes quick—

In working time the meshes slide over a rock or  
catch a sharp snag on the deck;

There is a catch on the propeller or a tangle with a vessel too close.  
A sea lion finds a salmon to steal and twists his way in the waving trap.

Sometimes slow—  
There are dark months of insulated Xtratufs on concrete shop floors;  
We share our net needles with friends like simple conversation.  
Hitch, stitch and don't forget:  
each person represents a knot bound in the community web.  
Corks for air and luck; lead for balance and wisdom.

Keep fishing and mending and testing and moving.  
Our nets must function as a whole.

This poem provides a concluding visualization and explains how the portraits together reflect the process of creating a community net. In addition to the real time mending, there is work necessary continuously to ensure that the net remains robust and dutiful. This is how I interpret the structure of a community— multiple relationships, social requirements, family obligations, employment, general well-being and safety of residents— individuals interact continuously to contribute to the community identity as a whole.

Finally, I have tremendous respect for the people I observed and the time they shared with me, not just through extractable interviews but in the intimate introduction to their community and details of what it is like to live there. Individuals shared small boat space, provided flights on aircraft, introduced local facilities and outdoor adventures. I am grateful to all who contributed details and their stories are not simply data but extended (and continual) details that depict a culture of personal experiences.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter presents distinct components of anthropological theory reflective of my research experience in interviewing, storytelling and community oral history. By creating opportunities for public performance and casual feedback rather than more structured academic presentation, the investigative process was unconventional and diversified by interdisciplinary influences in an array of fields that include creative writing and literary studies. The chapter also demonstrates how research was conducted, how this led to composition of the profiles and ultimately sharing stories with residents of Cordova.

The following are six areas of theoretical discussion that resonate with this dissertation project and its embrace of literary nonfiction in presenting ethnographic results. They are: 1) accountability and accuracy to the best extent possible in creation of the ethnographic portraits, 2) acknowledgment and awareness of an emic position in Alaska's fishing industry and using this dimension of familiarity to beneficially report and analyze commentary presented to me, 3) consideration of the difference between authoring and writing as composition techniques, 4) the role of context and setting of interviews and how the transition of time provides opportunities for expanded understanding of how stories convey meaning but also leads to difficulty in drawing conclusions that hold in permanence, 5) the use of photography and artifacts as implements to interpret past events and finally, 6) the role of public performance to gain audience feedback as a way to review material with community members and hear their critique of my work in regards to clarification, correction, and elaboration.



## 2.1 Accountability in Ethnographic Texts

Prior to the 1980's, ethnographic writing was not commonly subject to reflexive analysis on the part of cultural anthropologists. Composing research results was considered a straightforward affair, not a form of analysis in and of itself. Marcus and Cushman's article "Ethnographies as Texts," presents analytical tensions in ethnographic writing by considering the assumptions and process that guide the transition from an oral and interactive event to individually composed documentation that is necessary for the academic enterprise. Marcus and Cushman state, "we define [an] ethnography simply as an account resulting from having done field work" (1982, 27), "interest in the production of cultural knowledge about other forms of life" (28) and "fundamental ethnographic goals of description and interpretation" (28). These are features the discipline considered necessary for a composition to be legitimately and fittingly labeled in the literary category "ethnography."

Before my studies in anthropology, elements that resonated with me in storytelling composition included: plot, point of view, characterization, content, and style. These literary elements intersect with conventions in ethnographic writing and inform my work. These resonate most clearly with numbers two through five of the following standards that Marcus and Cushman list of what has historically been deemed necessary to include in an ethnography.

1. The unintrusive presence of the ethnographer in the text;
2. Common denominator people;
3. The marking of fieldwork experience;
4. The focus on everyday life situations;
5. Representation of the native point of view;
6. The stylistic extrapolation of particular data;
7. Embellishment by jargon;

8. Contextual exegesis (explanation or critical interpretation of a text) of native concepts and discourse” (31-36).

The nonfictional portraits that make up the core of my “ethnographic description” of Cordova reject the expectation of “completeness” and a unitary narrative structure that builds in the course of an ethnographic text. It rejects the first expectation, that the ethnographer’s presence is erased. Whether writing reflects it to a reader or not, ethnographic documentation is inevitably influenced by the subjectivity of the author and the goals, perspectives and interests of individuals in the community he or she studies. It is also influenced by the passage of time and the effect that has on interview dialogues that are ephemeral (even if they are based on material that is recorded and transcribed directly). These insights on subjectivity and temporality are among the most significant observations I gained from the process of bringing the profiles into dialogue with both academic audiences, readers and commentary with local residents as well as fishermen in other communities. If another researcher attempted to ask the same interviewees the same questions the material produced could not be an identical duplication; the influence of personality from both the interviewee and the interviewer inevitably influences how dialogue occurs and how it is recalled and analyzed in composition. It is not replicable, because there is an inevitably unrestricted quality to the entire process. What an interviewee states at the time he or she is asked an open question, is influenced by the circumstance or context of a conversation.

The subjectivity component implies that an author cannot be fully neutral. The author’s identity is inevitably present and the way the author interacts with the subjects will strongly influence what topics enter into dialogue. For example, though I used the same basic interview questions in recorded interviews, there were many cases where I had the benefit of learning from community residents through more extended conversations on board their boats, or in public

settings like the local library and museum, the grocery store, the bar, restaurant. Or, in some cases, an interviewee's personal home. Subjectivity does not necessarily modify credibility but it does contribute to features of reflexivity in dialogue and conversation.

The following examples illustrate how interactions in more casual settings influenced my understanding of the larger social components of the community as a whole. When visiting Cordova, I often stayed with an academic colleague and her spouse who grew up in Cordova and has fished commercially in the region and elsewhere in Alaska for most of his life. As the population size of Cordova is small, this woman typically knew who I was working with or interviewing and she might casually supply some background information about a person that I may not have known or thought to ask about during a structured interview. Or, we simply engaged in casual discussion about the nature of the community with dialogue occurring organically.

Other examples of more insightful, natural dialogue occurred when I was engaged in research and observations for longer periods of time, such as in the Cordova museum archives. The museum, at the time, was small and staff worked in close proximity. They provided desk space and as most of the staff have lived in the community for several decades, I would often ask a casual question about a photo that influenced my interpretation of a historic scene. Dialogue was not necessarily documented or formalized as it might be in a recorded interview but the value and meaning that the interactions supplied contributed deeply to my general awareness of the community.

Similarly, there were at least two cases where I spent more than twenty-four hours on a boat only thirty-two feet in length when the boat and crew were actively fishing. Settings and discussions like those are examples of where I absorbed the most about the culture of the

community in an interactive, holistic sense. These are less structured social environments and provide an opportunity for dialogue that is less formal and more natural. In relation to the Marcus and Cushman list of ethnographic necessities, these settings are examples of standards 4, 5 and 6, interacting with community members and fishermen in these settings or a validation of “the sense of an ethnographer’s intimacy with his subjects” (33).

Another piece that reflects the complexity of where the role of the ethnographer influences both the interview as it occurs and the way it is composed is Kirin Narayan’s “Ethnography and Fiction: Where is the Border?” She begins by considering some of the Geertzian perspective on literary genre and “where ethnography ends and fiction begins” (1973, 134). Narayan also touches on this in *Alive in the Writing*: “ethnographies are crafted representations, like fiction though not fictional” (2012, 9). Narayan’s list of features that makes an ethnography a credible and realistic representation of accurate human experience are: “1) disclosure of process, 2) generalization, 3) representations of subjectivity and 4) accountability” (134). Though an ethnographic narrative is solely composed (or “made”) by the researcher; it is not “made up.” The composed material has deliberate adherence to direct observations from the study location and the behavior of the people who live and work there. As Geertz describes, “the strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that it’s very nature demands that we talk about it without fuss...on pain of illusion, trump and self-bewitchment, leads on to the even stranger idea that if literalism is lost, so is fact” (1988, 140). The consideration of language as a creative art, structuring understanding through on-site word choice of conversation may not be entirely thorough but that does not necessarily indicate that the shared discussion is inaccurate or an intentional misrepresentation. As Clifford states in the introduction to *Writing Culture*, ethnographic material *is* constructed and partial but it is based on real experience (1986, 6-

7). Ethnography may have some of the same dimensions as fiction but “to do away with the border and altogether blur ethnography and fiction would entail a loss for both sorts of writing” (Narayan, 1999, 134). In order for an experience to be structured into documentation, it inevitably has to be put into a composed format and there is not simply one way to describe an experience that includes more than one person. This is the nature of human interpretation.

Narayan says, “the most important difference between fiction and ethnography resides in forms of accountability to the world outside the text” (1999, 141). She says, “though we accept that facts are selective, shaped by anthropologists’ personal proclivities and theoretical positions, it is an article of disciplinary faith that responsible anthropologists do not make up data” (142). In the process of writing, an ethnographic account depends on the intention of the ethnographer but at the time of the interview, accountability and accuracy can just as easily be influenced by what a subject chooses to share. Accountability is a virtue of personal integrity of the researcher and a dimension of trust from the person reading the composed document.

Clifford discusses this idea of re-presentation in another work, “On Ethnographic Allegory”: everything an ethnographer composes in text is allegorical “and a serious acceptance of this fact changes the way they can be written and read” (1988, 99). The written material is meant to focus on the person or community studied but the only person entirely responsible for the composition is the author, not the subject represented within it. As Clifford explains, “it’s not a complete account, nor is it based on a fully realized theory of ethnographic interpretation and textuality” (22). What makes the material “allegorical” is that it creates a characterization of the interviewee that is incomplete.

What an interviewee was inspired to express in an interview is inevitably influenced by the context of the situation. The journey of exploring ethnography incorporates Clifford’s

description of how a composed story is a “braided narrative” (104). The presence and personal inferences of the interviewer influences what the interviewee states at the time of the recording. Clifford explains this in similar terms in the chapter “On Ethnographic Authority” in *The Predicament of Culture*: “text” or the act of taking a conversation out of ethereal dialogue between two (or more people) and composing it puts the author in a position of ownership in terms of responsibility over what is reported (Clifford, 1988, 43).

Another, more distinct example of the role of context is demonstrated in comments within Margaret Blackman’s preface, introductory chapter and epilogue in *During My Time, Florence Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman* (1982). She discusses how “place or context played a considerable role in triggering Nani’s memory” (17) and gives the example of sitting at Nani’s kitchen table on a particularly stormy day and how what followed from these conditions was a discussion of the seasons. In a later interview, when Blackman was six months pregnant, the immediacy of that condition influenced the questions related to Haida perspectives on pregnancy (160). Both of these examples from Blackman’s work relate to the two primary dimensions of this section; dialogue is influenced by the context of setting and that a composed narrative is a woven account of what was discussed in an interview.

## 2.2 Emic Stance

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, when I chose to study Cordova, the Copper River salmon gill-net fishery was an occupation I considered to differ significantly from the fishing industry I am personally and culturally tied to. Retrospectively, my personal and proximal life experience in the general Alaskan fishing industry influenced me substantially through the process of research.

Through post-field work articulation what I ascertained about the community of Cordova was inevitably influenced by features of personal history. As Geertz states, “the personal relationship to our object of study is key to framing what we will think and express about it...all ethnography is part philosophy, and a good deal of the rest is confession” (Geertz, 1973, 346). To refer back to the Marcus and Cushman components of what is included in an ethnography, unlike the historically “typical” relationship between an anthropologist and their (culturally “exotic” and “othered”) hosts, in my ethnographic writing my opinion reflects actual proximity to “representation of a native point of view” (46).

My point of view related to the community of Cordova and the fishermen there is representative of a native point of view. Or as Dundes describes in “Texture, Text and Context” it shares characteristics of an inside, folk description. The vernacular vocabulary I used when I interacted with community members involved in the fishing industry was the same that I use speaking casually about industry topics on a daily basis with family and friends. The “proverbial texture” is a feature that Dundes refers to throughout the chapter and in my case of interpreting the community of Cordova, I understand this to mean a certain common ground that resonated the most with fishermen, community members who had a long standing personal awareness of the industry and community members whose experiences were similar to mine. Dundes uses the term “texture” to refer to the way people express themselves as in word choice, emphasis, tone, rhythm and inflection and occupational terminology. All of these minute structural aspects of language are a dimension of dialogue that resonate with me.

The series of portraits under the heading “Family Dynamics of Community Industry” are particularly memorable. All of the pieces in this set represent something personal to me; I grew up fishing with confident young men and that dimension of familiarity is expressed in the

opening of “Raise the Bar.” Another example is how the content of the story in “Fish Mom” reminds me of several generations of female members of my family and similar roles in cannery employment and Cook Inlet salmon set-net fisheries and my own experience in balancing the task of parenting with the employment opportunities of fishing.

In all portrait compositions, I consider myself as an interpretive frame. What interviewees shared with me was partially a result of specific interview questions, but a more general awareness of the industry contributed to our conversations. In fact, in cases where the interview questions had to be used the most in order to facilitate dialogue between myself and the interviewee, the stories told were perhaps the least collaborative with a somewhat synthetic tone or atmosphere and did not lend themselves to an interpretive “frame.” Pieces that exemplify this are “When the Oil Spilled” and “First Day Flight.” I chose to include these in an effort to express the broader community dynamics of Cordova, I believe they are valuable because they offer material helpful in understanding the community and certain social dimensions that I might have failed to acknowledge otherwise.

In other cases, I could address most of what I wanted to ask interviewees simply by speaking casually over a longer period of time. Again, it was all related to the context of the particular interview event and how I was able to relate to the interviewee on a personal level and in what I was observing.

### 2.3 Comparing Authoring to Writing

As I consider work as an author, part of what guides compositional choice is an effort to capture more elaborate features of dialogue tone and the background setting of the discussion with interviewees. There is a need to consider the deeper dimensions of what influences the way



conversation transpires. When I write for the purpose of reporting or journalism, the goal is typically to simply explain an event or a news story and share it with a general audience. In this context, I spend less time considering effects such as word choice, paragraph structure and order to an article. The objective of writing for journalism is to be informative and explanatory, it is more simplistic. The influences that stimulate conversation are not part of the structural arrangement. Also, the readers or audience are not necessarily looking for the most thorough explanations possible rather a source of general information in a more casual demeanor. I do not think either of the composition perspectives holds priority over the other but their purposes differ.

Clifford Geertz's begins the book *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* by comparing the tasks of writers and authors. He states the variation in multiple examples in the epigraph for this chapter: "An author performs a function, a writer an activity. The author participates in the Priest's role, the writer in the clerk's. For an author 'to write' is an intransitive verb—he is a man who radically absorbs the worlds *why* in a *how to write*. For a writer, "to write," is transitive—he writes *something*" (Geertz, 1988, 18-19).

For an example of the complexity in "authoring" rather than "writing," consider the portrait "Miss Emily—Delivery Days." Composition for that portrait did include a particular set of interview questions, but I was on-board the vessel for three days of observation time. Conversations I shared with the skipper, Mike, were more organic or naturally colloquial than interviews conducted in a more structured setting. In addition to specific interview questions, I spoke casually with the crew of the boat, observed deliveries from the bowpickers, generally experienced casual details such as the kind of food it was practical to cook in the galley, what the sleeping arrangements were, what the deck equipment included and general skill

sets of the crew members. My experience of the event is ingrained within that portrait and it informed how I created the portrait to reflect what I experienced about this aspect of the fishing community.

One portrait that resonates to me with a testimonial tone, more influenced by the represented speaker rather than personally authored is “When the Oil Spilled.” In that case, the interviewee was especially opinionated regarding the topics discussed and I recall it distinctly because my participation in the dialogue was minimal. It was practically an authentic monologue; I did not need to ask questions in order for the person to speak. My participation was simply writing (or transcribing, like a clerk) directly what the interviewee stated to me, the piece had very little personal observation within it. This relates to the author/ writer distinction because my participation in the dialogue was minimal, the speaker is a public and political figure in Cordova at the time of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill and the conversational material he supplied sounded more like an administrative report than a personalized story of his experience in Cordova. He did not offer a larger mosaic of identity.

Another perspective comparing differences between authoring and writing that resonates with my approach was proposed by Alma Gottlieb in a chapter titled “The Anthropologist as Storyteller” in *The Anthropologist as Writer*. Here, Gottlieb discusses the way “the scholarly article and monograph” (2015, 93) tend to encourage writing that is impersonal, formal and composed primarily to demonstrate intellectual innovation. Throughout the chapter, Gottlieb explains why it is beneficial to include public media and broaden readership. Popular writing allows a model to share community findings and, more importantly, offers a venue for feedback to reconfirm interpretations of subjective experiences that include other people (97, 99, 102, 104). These are the dynamics that feed an appreciation of authoring as opposed to just writing.

“Increasingly, easy access to well-written op-ed pieces, letters to the editor, magazine articles, radio pieces, satires, and blogs provides further tools that encourage us to experiment with writing that can draw readers to our work” (105).

Other anthropologists and social theorists who support and examine this further and who I have referred to and relied on for an academic point of view on authoring versus writing but not necessarily cited include the following: Bauman and Briggs 1990, Bauman and Sherzer 1975, Briggs 1986, Foucault 1979, Kline 1996, Maynard and Cahnman-Taylor 2010, Marcus and Cushman 1982, Jones 2004, Narayan 2007, Rosaldo 1993, Schneider 2002, Tedlock 1971, 1975, 1979, 1987, 1991, Toelken 1996. Some of these citations also informed and influenced what I address in Chapter 5, “Creating a Community Web.” The Tedlock pieces related to dialogue, subjectivity and literary dimensions of poetry composition were particularly useful.

## 2.4 Public Media and Ethnographic Composition

The resource of public media as an outreach for feedback is one of the most continuously successful and practical features of the portraits and a main contribution of this dissertation. Publishing opportunities that occurred in the midst of the research process were not something directly linked to the characters represented in the portraits here but fishermen can access articles published through the public media journal *National Fisherman* (this particular monthly magazine sits on the table or dashboard of almost every boat I visit), discuss them with me and validate a sense of credibility in industry awareness which tends to instigate further communication. Wulff suggests that, “by cultivating flexible writing, new possibilities for expression and conveyance spring up. This is beneficial for anthropological knowledge

production, not least as such writing might reveal different aspects of social and cultural life than traditional anthropological writing can do” (2015, 15).

Similarly, Pratt in “Fieldwork in Common Places,” makes the encouraging declaration that “anthropologists stand to gain from looking at themselves as writing inside as well as outside the discursive traditions that precede them; inside as well as outside the histories of contact they follow” (1986, 49). Clifford (1986) provides similar discussion on the fusion of anthropology and composition. He expresses repetitively that, “the practice of ethnography is a process of writing, specifically of textualization. Every description or interpretation that conceives itself as ‘bringing a culture into writing,’ moving from oral-discursive experience to a written version of that experience (ethnographic text) is enacting the structure of...inscription” (113). He asserts that “one can write up the results of an individual experience of research...this may generate a realistic account of the unwritten experience of another group or person. One can present this textualization as the outcome of observation, of interpretation, of dialogue” (115). This indicates the role of author; taking the multiple features of an experience and putting them into a composed format. In order to share that entirely, there needs to be more details included than just transcription from voice to text. Other features of the interview should include a description of: setting, participants involved, and context in general.

## 2.5 The Role of Context and Time

There is far more depth and a very challenging lack of closure to the style of interviews and conversations I experienced during fieldwork. In the case of my research, the stories that individuals related to me match more with the way that Dr. William Schneider describes oral history throughout *So They Understand: Cultural Issues in Oral History* (2003); he claims,

essentially that “stories do not stand still” (127). Similarly Clifford writes in the introduction to *Writing Culture*, “[c]ultures do not hold still for portraits” (10). What someone expresses at a particular time, even if it is through a structured interview, depends on the context of that moment and will not necessarily be expressed the same way again. As Schneider expresses, “oral tradition is built on multiple tellings and cumulative processing by listeners who hear the story in different ways...it is constructed both over time and each time a story is retold” (127).

One of the benefits of engaging in a long-term research project (10+ years) with multiple site visits to Cordova has given me deeper sense of awareness of time, shared memory and the process of general life history transitions. My background in creative writing provided confidence in taking an unconventional approach to writing about my findings. However, being pushed by committee members to make explicit how my writing intersects with anthropological theory has been a more challenging endeavor because some of the insights I gained throughout Schneider’s book and in Clifford and Marcus’ introduction to *Writing Culture*, have made me consciously consider retrospectively what decisions I made in converting material that was originally dialogue into text in ways that include more details and more clarification of things like: “Why was the person chosen? Why were the questions asked? How were they opened? How did the teller shape the interview or recording opportunity? What is the relationship between interviewer and narrator; audience and teller? (Schneider, 139). Or, in another recommendation, “there should be enough supporting material to be sure the listeners and viewers can visualize the story in their minds” (147). Unfortunately, some clarification features like that are not possible at this point because at the time when I conducted interviews, my concern was more with the process and practice of the information collection method of interviewing not the theory behind what influenced what people said to me and why.

To me, this again validates why multiple site visits to the community of Cordova were important. I learned about the community over a period of self-transitioning time (my field notes, for example include the fact that I had a two-and-a-half-year-old child with me and she was often present during a recorded interview) but the physical features of the community and residents there who maintained a personal relationship over the entire frame of the project helped me verify what I observed as community identity. Inevitably, as Crapanzano's piece suggests, features of myself as the author and the ethnographer has faced continual transitions. This component of ethnography makes a conclusion of a study arbitrary, "one could argue at one level the writing of ethnography is an attempt to put a full-stop to the ethnographic confrontation... writing selectively embalms reality rather than continuously explicating from it" (Crapanzano, 1977, 70). In other words, my frame for the portraits is embalming. It creates an obligatory closure to each "life story" of an individual who remains in a state of mobility.

## 2.6 Research Methods

The essential research and composition methods of this dissertation are based on oral history and the recurrent process of storytelling as a component of community identity and awareness. This embraces the progression of how a story transfers from the speaker or experience to an audience—either readers or listeners at a live performance event—and how the use of personal communication, inspired by stories, reinforces community history and identity because of what the audience chooses to share post-performance and how they react to the portraits.

## Replicable Techniques and Example Portraits

There were four primary components to how I collected and restructured material that serves as the basis for conclusions developed in this dissertation. These included 1) community site-visits and observations, 2) interviews, 3) transcriptions and 4) modification of interview transcripts into composed monologues or stories. In most cases, my own words were removed from the written material. The stories were prepared for presentation in public performance spaces with opportunities for public response. Written copies of some portraits were sent to reviewers for comment and elaboration. Portraits did not always reach the final stage of composition in the same manner. “Miss Emily--Delivery Days,” for example, provided far more detail than many of the other portraits that were based on a single, brief interview.

Appendices D and E are two portraits (“The Last Name with the Most Permits” and “When the Oil Spilled”) in transcript format to demonstrate the textual difference between interview, transcript and completed portrait. I chose to interview the individual I identified as “24TR” to provide a sense of the Russian Old Believer fleet in comparison to local permit holders. The interview was conducted in Homer, Alaska at the Kachemak Gear Shed--removed from Cordova and harbor. When I reconstructed this interview into a portrait, I removed my questions and commentary and focused more specifically on TR’s responses directly. A noticeable feature of this interview was how frank or blunt the interviewee was--there was no extended commentary or excess description outside of the questions asked directly. This differs from some of the other portraits where the interviewees participated in the interview process more by volunteering their own perspectives and information rather than only in response to the questions I proposed. “The Last Name with the Most Portraits” is therefore more of a report representative of a journalistic style article than a portrait where my own perspective as a partner in the interview dialogue shaped the story.

The portrait “Coffee Talk” is a better example of a piece where personal observation was more critical to both crafting the portrait and interpreting perspectives because the respondents participated in more self-engaged dialogue rather than specific interview questions. Interviewees failed to clarify or back up the observations they expounded and some of what was expressed, especially related to “ethnic diversity” in the fleet, is not sufficiently defined. Though I introduced myself and research intentions, my presence was less acknowledged or recognized than their pre-existing personal and informal interactions.

There are some portraits where what I intend to display is not based on a single interview or in some cases, an interview at all. The aim of including these (“Portrait of the Copper River Flats,” “Prince William Sound Poetry Set,” “Vision from the Archives,” “Fish Traps and Statehood,” “If Boats Could Speak”) is to illustrate other aspects of the community, both social and environmental, through compilation of personal observations or archival and historical research. History was one dimension of consideration and environmental dimensions were another.

## Interviewing

At the introductory level, I studied standard interview techniques: basic processes for collecting informant information through oral questions, direct responses and personal storytelling. In the beginning of the research, it was a matter of identifying a general theme to cover, choosing questions that could provide suitable commentary on that theme and reporting accurately and honestly on the responses to questions.

The first methods I used for interviewing Cordova residents and Copper River fishermen were a standard, traditional and usually recorded interview process. A set series of questions (presented in Appendix B) were established as a guideline but I intentionally conducted



interviews so that interviewees could follow their own sequence of storytelling and explain significant topics that influenced their lives in Cordova. I kept note of the questions in front of me, allowed transitions and alternate topics to emerge naturally and attempted to find ways to fit each question into the general conversation. Though, as I describe in more detail in this chapter, conversations were significantly influenced by the settings and timings in which they occurred.

The literature referenced that lead to the basic principles of conducting ethnographic interviews were Spradley's *Ethnographic Interview*, Rubin and Rubin's *Qualitative Interviewing: the Art of Hearing Data*, Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology*. Early in my academic preparation (summer of 2009), I attended the National Science Foundation's Summer Institute for Research Design (SIRD) in Cultural Anthropology at Duke University Marine Lab in Beaufort, NC. My instructors were H. Russell Bernard (U. of Florida), Susan Weller (U. of Texas Medical Branch) and Jeffrey Johnson (East Carolina University). At the time I already knew I would conduct dissertation research related to oral history and community anthropology and was provided opportunities to practice interview techniques with classmates. These texts and practice situations were helpful, but experience and direct interaction with the interviewees over the time it took me to complete this dissertation was more useful than what I referenced for models in the early stages of research. A final realization is that it is not specificity of questions that were the most significant but the interpersonal dynamic with the interviewee and how we responded to each other. It is not just responses to questions but how those questions relate to the personal history and identity of the individual and then, how that individual contributes to larger community identity.

The constructed portraits based on interviews were completed with as much accuracy as I could direct towards each piece that was based primarily on oral information presented to me by

an interviewee. If I were to reference the portraits to prove or discuss a particular feature of the occupational culture of the salmon industry in Cordova and how it has changed over time, I believe the material within could do that but more in a sense of storytelling or communicative testimony rather than statistical or quantitative data.

#### Process: Solidifying Conversation in Composition

As the research process progressed and I became increasingly engaged in the life of the community of Cordova, I realized that I would deliver more than a basic, objective analysis of interviewees and the information they provided. I did not conduct interviews as statistical or calculable assessments or surveys of the community. Community stories and the process through which I heard them became increasingly interactive because I often interviewed people within the same families, people in the same working groups or experienced interactions with community members that were more social than formal interviews. Dennis Tedlock (1979) refers to this as “dialogical anthropology” or “human intersubjectivity” (388)—as researcher, I cannot legitimately remove myself from the stories I hear, the conversations I had, and the way I chose to compose them. Tedlock states the impossibility of “hands-off eavesdropping” (394)—both the teller of the story and the listener influences how it is expressed, heard and interpreted. The formulation of an interview, especially in representation as a portrait, is the joint articulation of thoughts from both the informant and myself and did not end simply with material collected in a recording. Documentation in the interviews and the portraits are subjective and shared values, attitudes, and descriptions based on the experience of living and working with people in the community. Feedback and continuous interaction with the people interviewed is, therefore, important in my assessment and descriptions and as time passes it is nearly impossible to find definite closure in reoccurring dialogue.

For example, see the Appendix D: Reviews of Written Portraits. Reviewer 1 (RL), is a woman originally from Cordova who now lives in Homer, Alaska. In March 2019, RL visited her family in Cordova and provided me with several very casual, unsought comments such as: “we spent one fun day on the ski hill but the weather is currently incredibly crappy! I think weather is a bigger factor than fishing on Cordovan psyche!”

The long-lasting relationships and continuous opportunities for response and interactive research with interviewees directly such as Margaret Blackman’s work with Florence Edenshaw Davidson or Julie Cruikshank’s collaboration with Mrs. Angela Sidney resonated to me in terms of interview relationships over an extended period. These cases show that because of long-term alliances, the stories have more meaning. When Cruikshank published “Pete’s Song” it was clearly not the result of a single interview session. The same is true for Blackman’s publication *During my Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson, A Haida Woman*. The Marcus and Cushman piece, “Ethnographies as Texts,” explains this transition over time perfectly: “it is impossible to work back from original fieldwork enterprise in anything like the way a chemist can work back through an experiment reported by another chemist” (1982, 32). Partially, this is because “cultures are not scientific objects... Culture, and our view of ‘it,’ are produced historically, and are actively contested... Culture is contested, temporal and emergent. It is thoroughly historicist and self-reflexive” (Clifford and Marcus, 1986, 18-19).

## 2.7 Creating Community Portraits: Example Models

The following books served as literary models for how to portray individual characters as important members of an entire community: Junichi Saga’s *Memories of Silk and Straw*, Randall Peffer’s *Watermen*, Edward Glazier’s *Hawaiian Fishermen*, Timothy Lloyd and Patrick Mullen’s

*Lake Erie Fishermen*, Ron Blythe's *Akenfield: Life in an English Village*, Tamara Hareven's *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City*, Edward Ive's *George Magoon and the Down East Game War*, Margaret Blackman's *Sadie Brower Neakok: An Inupiaq Woman* and *During my Time: Florence Edenshaw Davidson. A Haida Woman*. The last two examples are full-length individual life history biographies, not necessarily community-based history, although they are windows into community because they follow long-term residents and how they responded to the community settings around them.

The specific artistic literature I used as models throughout this research are related to fisheries and fishing communities. They include, primarily, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and secondarily, John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*. For poetry, I looked into Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems* and Vincent Ferrini's *Know Fish*. Both of the poetry texts reference Melville's *Moby Dick* and are distinctly linked to the historic port of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The site is clearly removed far from Cordova, but still related due to the history of East Coast cod and the culture of participating in commercial fisheries.

What binds all of these creative manuscripts together is a sense of what the humanities have the power to provide in interpreting and understanding the lives we see. Though more fictional or poetic, rather than "objective," these texts still rely on a study of people and demonstrate that this inevitably relies on the eyes, ears and perceptions of the writer. Novels and poetry cited as models contain realism—there are location specific seascapes, accurate marine weather scenarios, casual but descriptive fishery and harvest techniques and character relationships modeled after those that occurred in actual fishing settings. Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*, for example, was based primarily on Monterrey, California marine biologist Ed Ricketts. Melville's

*Moby Dick* was inspired by a true tale of a whaling ship called the Essex that sank after being attacked by a sperm whale.

The art and craft of literary novels provide a credible source of knowledge for the realistic features contained in the story—the setting, the details of scene, the human characteristics, the landscape (or seascape). Knowledge options within a work of fiction are boundless because the author’s creative skill transforms the subject into linked expressions that can be visualized and therefore experienced by the readers across restrictions of time and space. Awareness possibilities include features familiar to both the author and reader. The second source is the reader’s own background with personal knowledge and memory and how those two features can form an accurate understanding of the words.

## 2.8 Poetry: Capturing Sound in Writing

*“POETRY is oral HISTORY*

*And oral HISTORY*

*is POETRY.” Tedlock, 1975.*

This piece, “Learning to Listen,” by Tedlock, is ethno poetically formatted to reinforce the meaning and illustrates some excellent aspects of oral history as poetry. Before one can begin to read the piece, “Learning to Listen: Oral History as Poetry,” it is necessary to read instructions explaining what different formatting means in the translation from just text to the sounds Tedlock intends to portray. It is important to consider the actual sound of the interview session—pauses, intonation, paraphrasing, exclamations, moments of ambiguity, even eye movement and obvious interviewee internal reflection as he or she contemplates an interview question or reinforces or withdraws a particular statement. Some people are more likely to speak

very casually and others with pre-established formality. All of these features are informed by the personality of the interviewer and simple transcription does not paraphrase these components of discussion features. These are characteristics I try to convey in performance.

In addition, poetry can create a more perceptible sense of sound. It remains fresh, with a sense of immediacy. In a sense, this is why I felt a connection to poetry throughout the process of my dissertation work, notably Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems* (and Butterick's guide to the poems). There are certain sections of this selection that appear more like longer prose or testimony than a traditional poetry format. For example, "[2. Letter on Georges]," appears as a transcript of a discussion among several people aboard the schooner Ella M. Goodwin when it encountered a winter storm on Georges' Bank. Details of the storm are not prominent but the interactions with the crew are composed in a way that provides the text with a sense of tonality suggesting a casual testimony from several people who experienced the event. The location and history of Georges Bank far surpasses (by size and history) the Copper River Delta, but the social feature of the place and people makes me think of the Delta (especially the flat islands that are so frequently referred to), as micro-size similarity.

Another feature of Olson's that reminds me of fishery realism written with a poetic and lyrical quality is exemplified simply with the inclusion of a grocery and supply list. Here "14 MEN STAGE HEAD WINTER" is composed solely as a series of items to satisfy basic need. This reminds me of the contemporary occupation in commercial fisheries to the extent that the items listed are especially similar: "beef, bacon, butter, cheese, oatmeal, 2 copper kettles, frying pan...saws, hammers, nails." A ship's grocery list includes nothing more than the very basics to accomplish a required necessity, food, with no intention for elaborate cooking.

The craft and practice of poetry shaped my approach and offered me many lessons on collecting ethnographic material in Cordova and interpreting what I observed there. Because my work is conducted as both oral history through interviews and is intended for performance, I recognize this hybridity between the fields of ethnography and various dimensions of creative writing.

## 2.9 Story by Visual Review: Archival Photos

An additional feature of my site visits that was exceptionally beneficial was an opportunity to spend time going through local museum collections of historic Cordova media. I was specifically looking for photos related to salmon fisheries but even seeing things like community design (street and sidewalks, for example) improved my awareness of some dimensions of the town as it is today. Cordova is not new and with no extensive in town road system, a fairly steep incline from the harbor to mountains surrounding the town, the physical community never expanded. Some visual features of the community have encountered little change.

The harbor as a community “heart,” a central dimension, was very obvious in the museum photos. Although some of the images were not dated, it is obvious from the style of the boats that the harbor pictures were pre-statehood. The examples below show how similar the harbor looked then as it does now: stocked full of boats and ready to fish. There is a sense of intensity and anticipation within these pictures similar to what is apparent just before the salmon season opens in the harbor today.

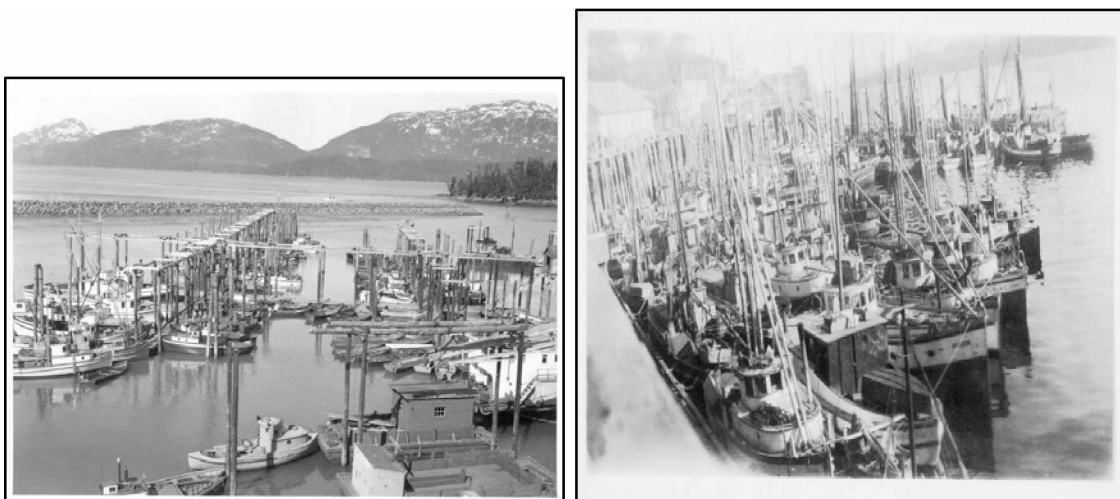


Figure 1: Historic Cordova Harbor (Photos courtesy of Cordova Historical Museum)

## 2.10 Story Beyond the Interview: The Self as Creative Interpreter

In later stages of research within the community, I began to think of the stories that people told me and the way I interpreted them and re-presented them in the performance modes akin to the realm of creative writing. Some of this creative intersubjectivity can be found in the profiles that have a personal tone of my own without the inclusion of an interview: “Portrait of the Flats,” the “Prince William Sound Poetry Set” and “If the Boats Could Speak.” The first of these is composed primarily as an essay but it has poetic features, too. The piece addresses my first experiences of visiting the Flats on the deck of a friend’s boat for two days of pre-season subsistence harvest and the subsequent opening days of the 2011 season. In this piece, I reflect on how difficult it is to have an initial analytical response to an unfamiliar setting:

*Today is clear and I feel lucky to see the channels and streams running in intricate ribbons across the flat land. More often, this region is completely covered in dense wet fog. This is a maze and all of the complexities of where I am would be a hidden secret. My portrait is one of juvenile awe—this isn’t my place it’s a journey, a visit to a place I can’t reach with my own heart. Yet. It’s new territory and this portrait turns into a fleeing memory....*



*...The words for my first trip on a drift boat: speed, space, flats, Kings, web, engine, green Victorinox, speeding 25 knots in 6 feet of water. Mike's advice: Dig through the web and make your hands work like paws. Hold your fingers together so they don't tangle. It is not the same as the seining I'm used to. Maybe when I ask people for simple signs of place they don't know where to start. The details are so broad here.*

The “Prince William Sound Poetry Set,” was composed in the late summer of 2015, after another four years had passed in the research process and shows a beginning consideration of the notion of my “research” as an integrated life goal; not just an academic goal. The self-narrated pieces demonstrate some vulnerability and frustration with passing time and struggling academic accomplishment but also a sense of awareness for how the local natural environment in Prince William Sound (and other marine locations in Alaska) strongly influences the components of my interpretation and sense of self in the process of understanding place. In the following quote, the reference of “rocks” is meant to be a metaphor for the human characters who contributed to my portrait set and “water” is meant to be the flow of life around us that is constantly changing, influencing interpretation and expression, but without fully changing the person’s actual presence:

*“There is something accelerating, buoyant here in the depths of Prince William Sound.  
The channel is narrow; pairs of otters perform beach to beach.  
All the waterfalls, new but quickly accepted displays of vertical rush, are from the past days of streaming rain.  
As a passenger (not a deckhand) the simple run of a boat is enough for a sense of achievement.  
My motion for the day is a shift.  
Here is a space, a place—flat rocks stand up to the water. Let the water do what it will, the rocks remain.”*

## 2.11 Performance to Enliven Stories

The role and opportunity to perform or present profiles to audiences in various locations, including Cordova, creates a casual occasion to receive feedback interaction with the stories. It provides a chance to enliven a recorded or transcribed document and compare the material within it to a larger community group. This observation matches Richard Bauman's and Charles Briggs's description of the role of presenting written material to an audience, "performance...provides a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes. A given performance is tied to a number of speech events that precede and succeed it (past performances, readings of texts, negotiations, rehearsals, gossip reports, critiques, challenges, subsequent performances and the like)" (Bauman and Briggs, 1990, 60-61). In all of those cases, there is interactive communication and interpretation that can be shared in dialogue with others who listen to the performance. A performance setting is non-threatening. Sensitive subjects can be approached openly without audience members feeling they and their opinions are an object of argument. The events, though distinctly organized, are usually social and colloquial not a formal evaluation of the material presented. But, the value of feedback from performance or from readers of my portraits is that it provides the community an opportunity to elaborate on the interpretations, to clarify how features may differ depending on who the character is or how the general dynamic of the community has changed over time.

In addition to performance outlets, the stories that emerge on stage are constantly retold and revised in behind the scenes dialogue. Though the FisherPoet Gathering (held in Astoria, OR) is a well-structured annual public performance that runs for hours at many venues, stories continue late into the evening. As Saris writes, "story mingles with ethnography which mingles with story" (1993, 175). Performance events and the social component of them are an excellent

method to consider composition and open the story back up to community interpretation. Or, an opportunity for “ethnographic allegory” as discussed by Clifford, that “any story has a propensity to generate another story in the mind of its reader (or listener) to repeat and displace some prior story” (1986, 100). For example, one of the portraits reviewed as a written document was “The Last Name With the Most Permits.” Two individuals provided commentary that strongly disagreed with the interviewee’s position related to safety and weather on the flats. I welcome additional perspective because it opens the discussion to alternative awareness grounded in the different experiences and evaluations of these fishermen.

## 2.12 Speaker and Audience

The role of audience and interaction between audience and speaker is important. Toelken describes that the material presented will be absorbed differently depending on audience familiarity with the situation expressed. As the portraits almost all include the key group value placed on salmon, performances “help reinforce and maintain the central ideas to the group” (Toelken, 1996). Cruikshank also describes the important role of audience: “story involves not simply a narrator but also an audience—both roles can change...and in different circumstances giving one story the potential range of meanings that all good stories have” (1995, 56).

Performing stories in a public setting activates both the story itself and potentially a listener whose reaction to what I present may create a link to some similar memories related to his or her own experience. The following is a specific example of a reading that occurred in Cordova. It is described here to illustrate the dynamic way performance can enable further discussion and provide supplemental and more thorough details. Both an inspiration for this idea and a reflective source that reminds me of my work retrospectively is the Communities of Memory

Project at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, sponsored by the Alaska Humanities Forum in 1996. This project included seven Alaska communities and collected recordings from residents within them. The published collection, as a whole is titled *Communities of Memory* with Phyllis Morrow serving as editor (2003). Each community recognized in the project is presented by whoever led the research in that area. In the introductory chapter, it is described as “it was not research, oral history or a conference, but was a hybrid that arose from local concerns, was facilitated by a central agency, and then turned back to local participants for its design and implementation” (Partnow, 2003, ix). One of the underlying premises of the project was that “community-wide storytelling events provide a place for people from diverse backgrounds to meet each other face-to-face without the divisions that accompany political issues” (x). This also resonates to me in several ways, first, in the context of the Copper River drift fleet, as a whole, all participants included, it is a way to look at the stories without necessarily focus on conflicts or differences in fleet members. Secondly, that sharing stories together in a community setting, officially performed or just communicated casually, demonstrates a sense of where a particular topic (in the case of this project, commercial fishing as an occupation and a cultural component of Cordova) fits with a larger group of people. For example, note the performance described below.

#### 2.13 Community Reading. Cordova, Public Court Room, December 2013.

On December 17, 2013 I presented a guest reading that provided stories of several young (under the age of 30) fishermen who grew up in Cordova and were all 2. or 3. generation fishermen. The audience included approximately 15 people, all year-round residents of Cordova. When I finished reading, two men spoke casually to me about the story and accurately

identified the young men represented in the piece (although actual names are not included in my pieces). One respondent was the young man's father and as we talked he heartily suggested that I get back in-touch with him and he would provide me with photos of the interviewee from when he was fishing as a child, some funnier moments when he first started fishing on his own and was perfectly content to speak at length about family features of the vessel and various dimensions of their commercial occurrences. This experience was significant to me because it illustrated the potent dialogic opportunities sharing oral histories provides. Because I was able to share the story, even with indirect reference to the speaker, I was able to gather further opportunities an escalated prospect for additional information on the original interviewee and the extended culture of his family and public Cordova experiences.

On other performance occasions, I noticed the significance of having a performer read a piece that he or she was unfamiliar with in terms of the fishery occupation described. When this happened, it often improved audience participation with the script because the performer read the material with inaccurate intonation or, in some cases, with no awareness of what part of the boat, gear or fishing task was being described. This prompted audience members to inform or correct the speaker, enhancing discussion.

Though I came across some of the benefits of having "outsiders" to the industry perform my pieces as a tool, having strangers perform others' stories is not unique. In Schneider's *Living With Stories*, McConaghy's piece describes the role of participatory theater at Seattle's Museum of History and Industry. This museum offers the opportunity of "reader's theater" where visitors can role-play various characters through script. This is valuable, because like I find in my own work, it gives some freedom to the voice in the script. It opens a venue for discussion about impacts and hardships of historical events and attitudes but also the usual times of joy or

celebration. Although responses are often essentially anecdotal and brief, they have helped me continue engagement with industry, storytelling and media, in contrast to more formalized and regulated commentary in the context of fisheries policy venues.

In general, my experience throughout this process of research is grounded in the multiple (and continuing) opportunities to be present in the community of Cordova. Individual interviews were something new to my academic knowledge base when I started this project and I am pleased that I gained confidence in how to conduct them effectively. But beyond recordings, this dissertation is based on a growing understanding of community, an appreciation of the culture and the individuals who live in Cordova. My job and challenge has been not to simply record and textualize interviews but to include contextual features that allow a reader to understand what was shared, including the qualitative, subjective role I bring to my work.

## 2.14 Conclusion

A community is not static, so though one can report on it as an outsider looking in, one cannot completely verify full dimensions of both the history and dynamic nature of an active social environment. A community and even a single individual and his or her identity or personality, is fluid. Similarly, a single interview provides only a short glimpse of what an interviewee's total life experience could more thoroughly share on a particular topic, subject, considered over a longer period of time.

Sherna Gluck addresses a similar observation in her piece "The Representation of Politics and the Politics of Representation," in *Living with Stories*. She asks in her introduction, "realizing that people's representations will change depending not only on their own personal developments but also on the changing sociopolitical contexts in which the interview is

conducted, can we assume that a narrative is more than merely a very transitory representation?” (2008, 120-1). Material from an interview can be compared to material from other interviews to help determine accuracy of responses but it is all influenced by the context of setting and the purpose for which a story or even an observation is communicated. Even with the assistance of a recording device or the use of copious notes, language or dialogue disbands into personal interpretation and memory as soon as it occurs. Some of the discussion may be more memorable than other parts and a recorded interview may be recalled more easily. As I think of my recorded interviews, it would surprise me if many of the interviewees recall the exact way they told the story much less the information they specifically chose to share at the time. As Annie Dillard states, “nothing temporal, spatial, perceptual, social or moral is fixed” (1982, 24).

Some of the material discussed can be distinct facts or statistical information, a person’s birthday, for example, or how long he or she has owned a fishing permit in the area or a description of what tools and technology are needed to efficiently operate the fishing vessel. These are important details to understanding the fleet and what it means to operate a fishing vessel. But, what cannot ultimately be captured in finality are topics such as values, meanings, emotions, opinions or anything related to the complexity of personality and transitions that occur through the process of time and experience. That does not make the details within the portraits of this dissertation inaccurate or fictional; but it is important to acknowledge they do not address the dynamics of how Cordova and the residents might look different to me, the author, today. However, some features may change, the general underlying tone of what the community expresses, as a whole about both the economic and cultural value of fish and fishing will likely remain. That broad analytical conclusion defines important features of the community of Cordova.

Finally, the role of additional options for expressing human dimensions of industry and transitions that have been valuable in this project are both museum archival material (mostly photographs but also personal letters) and public presentation of my experiences in media and performance to share and receive valid interpretations of my work through community sentiment, values and ways of seeing and evaluating their lives.

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### Chapter 3: Backdrop: Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Fishing Communities

In this chapter, I consider three categories of literature related to prior research on fishing and fishing communities:

- 1) Social-economic research related to fleet behavior, decision making and fishing tactics as they pertain to transitions in fisheries management and marine policy;
- 2) Published ethnographic descriptions of a particular fishery, group of fishermen, or a geographic community that identifies as a fishing community,
- 3) Literature that uses collections of personal experience to represent a community or occupational group.

The first category is primarily represented by peer-reviewed articles, book-length compilations of papers, or management reports; these typically have an academic or professional research demeanor. The primary assessments of these focus more on how understandings of individual fishing communities can serve as indicators to potentially necessary transitions in management in order to best accommodate sustainability of resources in the occupation of commercial fishing. In other cases, this type of research compares accessibility or allocation issues related to species of fish. Often, especially in the federal fisheries, there is more than one type of gear that is used in the harvests. In order to accommodate this objectively without bias toward one group over another, management must consider a variety of features that influence the process of fishing such as vessel size, gear operational dimensions, crew size and many other things. One University of Alaska anthropologist who has participated in this general field, particularly over the past ten years is Dr. Courtney Carothers. In a special section of the *Marine Policy: the International Journal of Ocean Affairs*, she joined a larger team of editors to “discuss recent anthropological research on fishing communities in an effort to highlight the utility of these

approaches to the management process” (Carothers et al., 2016, 288). In this particular publication, the editors took a more “broad, multifaceted approach to the idea of community to look at group behavior” beyond just those participating in the fishery itself. Other “group” dimensions considered included gender, social behavior and dynamics of management agencies (in this case the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council), and social and cultural issues in fisheries in an international scope.

The second category are book-length ethnographies and other anthropological studies administered through organizations such as Sea Grant, the Ohio State University’s Center for Folklore Studies, the University of Oregon Folklife Network. There are also examples that fit into this category that are specific to Cordova. For example, the Alaska Historical Society’s Canneries Initiative (<https://alaskahistoricalociety.org/page/2/?s=commercial+fishing>) created to document and assist in preserving Alaska’s seafood processing history and the Cordova Historical Society’s publication *From Fish and Copper: Cordova’s Heritage and Buildings* (Nielsen, 1984). A similar project was concurrently funded by the city of Cordova also in 1984 when the community was celebrating 75 years as an incorporated city. *Cordova, the First 75 Years* (Arvidson, 1984) is a photographic history and is primarily a series of collected photographs, a few hand drawn maps of the community and brief descriptions of what is depicted. In many cases, the composers show comparative photos of the same buildings or locations over a long period of time. In one case, there is a photo of the buildings one would pass when walking down Council Avenue hill (a central roadway in Cordova) in 1908 and 1976. Some of those buildings are still recognizable today. In comparison to the first branch, these are typically more extensive case studies rather than fisheries policy related manuscripts and they are less formal but an informative way to get a sense of the community and the role the

occupation of commercial fishing contributes to the local identity. I include these examples to demonstrate that the physical community features have not changed much over time. It shows, to me, that the community has a long-standing demeanor. That there is a heart to it and the centrality of the harbor is key. Also, these two texts (Arvidson and Nielsen) compliment the portrait entitled “Visions from the Archives” that I constructed by referencing photos from the Cordova’s community museum.

The third category is slightly more difficult to classify. While it generally consists of nonfiction based on the author’s participatory experience working, living and writing in a fishing community (or communities), it also includes fictional literature that realistically and accurately portrays life aboard fishing vessels or within fishing communities. These compositions have a literary tone that is more publically accessible, professionally published (in most cases), typically very descriptive and informative but may lack a more structured analysis about a distinct community of fishermen. Literature examples in the second branch are structured more systematically and formally rather than by the personal dimensions that weave throughout approach three. However, literature in the third category often provides the most specific details and experiential elements of the fisheries and communities they present. They are personal stories and this feature contributes to the emic/ etic theoretical discussion in Chapter 6.

For this chapter I will describe the three branches of anthropological literature on fish and fisheries in more detail and provide examples for each category. Drawing these branches of literature together creates a more nuanced understanding of what defines a fishing community. As suggested above, these approaches vary in the style and manner in which they communicate features of fishing but when brought together the two features that stand out the



most to me are “common” and “unity.” They all point to a group dynamic where individuals, by virtue of engaging in fishing as an occupation, share commonalities with a larger group.

George Hillery’s “Definitions of Community” provides a total of 94 “classification(s) of selected definitions of community according to content” (1955, 114-115). The definitions included in his chart provide various dimensions and a philosophical description of the ways that groups of people can be drawn together in various ways to create a sense of cohesion.

If a community is defined simply as a physical location--a city for example--then it could be labeled solely with geographic coordinates, a specific place-based locality. One could classify Cordova as a fishing community, but that geographic specificity does not account for all of the fishermen who participate in Copper River drift-fleet or their relationships with each other and with the community of Cordova. There are other very distinct cultures, specifically those from within the Russian Old Believer heritage, who are prominent participants in the fishery. Though isolated from Cordova residents and other members of the Copper River drift-fleet, Russian Old Believers are members of the Copper River occupational community. The concept of community needs to be shaped depending on the context of the individuals who are drawn together in space, time, common interests or common pursuits.

### 3.1 Category 1: Anthropology in Fisheries Management

Research interests that initially influenced my academic motivation were related to social-economic features in fisheries management and marine policy. This is the field I was most engaged with when working towards a Master’s degree at the University of Washington’s School of Marine Affairs. My Master’s Degree was funded through NOAA’s Alaska Fisheries Science Center and my thesis research, “Through a Cod’s Eye: Exploring the Social Context of Alaska’s

Bering Sea Groundfish Industry,” was the project with which I began academically interviewing fishermen. Most literature in this category is published in academic journals and in technical reports of management agencies. The majority of it focuses on social science and commercial fisheries management specifically, not on the array of cultural features and commonalities that help clarify the meaning of fishing to fishing communities in a social-economic context. Social-economic research of this type is important to federal fisheries management as a result of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (MSFCMA) and the inclusion of National Standard 8 which mandates that fishery management plans “identify and consider the social and economic consequences of fisheries management actions on fishing communities” (Jacob et al., 2001, 16).

As mentioned in the introduction, another anthropologist who has contributed to this particular branch of fisheries anthropology is Dr. Courtney Carothers. Her work in the discipline originated with a doctorate degree situated in the field of environmental anthropology, extremely interdisciplinary in some ways but concurrently, quite systematic. As self-described in the completion of her doctorate work, “this dissertation demonstrates how a diverse set of anthropological methods and analytical tools can be used to evaluate the distributive effects of natural resource policies and explore trends in policy-making, particularly the conflicts over competing claims of knowledge and disparate values about how resources should be managed” (Carothers, 2008, 205-206). This general description is how I observe Carothers’ current work. It is more related to social dimensions of resource allocation than the role of fisheries participation as it contributes to community identity, general character and behavior tactics.

In a paper by Clay and Olson, anthropologists with the National Marine Fisheries Service, they refer to the MSFCMA definition: “In U.S. Fisheries policy, the Fishery

Conservation and Management Act defines *fishing community* as substantially dependent on or substantially engaged in the harvest or processing of fishery resources to meet social and economic needs, and includes fishing vessel owners, operators, and crew and United States fish processors that are based in such community” (2007, 29). This definition is static. It addresses physical, geographic, economic and social tones but fails to include more holistic or human cultural features that Hillery argues guide anthropological definitions of community, like “kinship, consciousness of kind, individuality, totality of attitudes, possession of common ends, norms and means” (114). Some components that seem critical to consider when determining the specific social features of communities involved in the industry include topics such as: family implications when fishermen are away from home, gender diversification and expectations both on water and in shore-based components, owner/ operator/ crew skills and capabilities.

Additional literature examples that explore features of social dynamics within the occupation of commercial fishing, particularly as it is related to the topics discussed in this case in fisheries management and “fishing-communities” include: Couper 1997, Endter-Wada and Kenan 2005, Gatewood 1984, Jacob 2005, Larson 1999, Menzies 2008, Palsson 1998, Pollnac 1988, Reedy-Maschner 2007. These are typically academic journal publications and more social and economic than ethnographic. One study specifically related to Prince William Sound salmon is Pinkerton’s “Economic and Management Benefits from the Coordination of Capture and Culture Fisheries: The Case of Prince William Sound Pink Salmon.”

#### James Acheson’s “Anthropology of Fishing”

Acheson’s “Anthropology of Fishing” provides an overview of various studies “focusing on the way that human beings have adapted to earning a living in a marine environment” (Acheson, 1981, 275). This article provides many accurate and specific details of social

components related to commercial fishing in the broad scope of fisheries. But the studies he reviews lack a humanities related description of the personal, social, and cultural dynamics of fishing. The article focuses on objective components of what the occupation of commercial fishing entails including: work in an environmental setting (the ocean) that requires equipment and machinery to support human life (boats), exploitation of animals that are not seen from above the surface of the water, organization and skill requirements of crew members, access to fishing rights, marketing techniques, competition with other fishermen, individual fishing strategies, psychological and common personality traits of fishermen. It is informative and dense with citations but with a detached tone; descriptions are sterile and impersonal. He suggests many topics that would suitably fit within the classification of fisheries anthropology but does not provide precise details. For example, Acheson cites information available in Orbach's *Hunters, Seamen and Entrepreneurs* (1977) regarding crew recruitment: "[t]he reasons that the skippers choose their crews almost exclusively from their friends and relations is unclear" (280). Acheson goes on to speculate about why this happens, but this speculation is relatively dissimilar to what I have learned about this topic as an insider regarding how crewmembers are recruited and maintain positions on-board a particular vessel from one year to the next.

However, many other ideas referenced in Acheson's paper feature in my experiences in fishing and in the interviews and relationships I have come to know through the Cordova project: radio groups, competitive risk taking, self-oriented risk assessment and assistance to other vessels in need while on the water, maintenance standards and occupational skill sets that fishermen hold, the notion of myths and superstition on-board vessels and how strong they are, psychological similarities in those who choose to go into the occupational field of fisheries, and more.

The content within Acheson's paper is broad and though some of the ideas would resonate with fishermen as individuals, it is not likely that it would receive as much response and re-instigated storytelling if it were "performed" because the style of writing is abstract and so generic to fisheries as an international whole instead of with a distinct social or cultural dimension.

### 3.2 Category 2: Fishing Community Case Studies

The second category of literature studied for this project, were book-length ethnographic publications that explored cultural identity related to participation in specific fisheries. Three influential examples that I will review here are Timothy Lloyd and Patrick Mullen's *Lake Erie Fishermen: Work, Identity and Tradition*, Michael Orbach's *Hunters, Seamen, and Entrepreneurs* and finally, Courtland Smith's *Salmon Fishers of the Columbia*.

*Lake Erie Fishermen* is the outcome of joint research project between the Folk Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ohio Sea Grant College Program. In the preface to this book, the authors specifically refer to the fishing stories they gather as a study in folklore. Patrick Mullen is a core faculty in the Center for Folklore Studies at Ohio State University and is affiliated with the English Department as well. Timothy Lloyd served as the Executive Director of the American Folklore Society from 2001 to 2018, he holds a PhD in American Studies from the George Washington University. Authors began the project "actively seeking folk beliefs, weather signs, proverbs, legends and jokes" (Lloyd and Mullen, 1990, xii), but as their work progressed the material they found most typical were stories fishermen told regarding their personal experiences of fishing.

This book appealed to my interest in the role of dialogue because of the trust in language and therefore comprehensive communication between the authors and their interviewees. There is less concern in boundaries of conversation but rather an assumed precision of how fishermen present themselves and their life. Lloyd and Mullen suggest the primary “heart of the book is made up of the fishermen telling their own stories in their own words” (xiii) but they also supply context and setting to when and where the fishermen are. In their introduction, the authors suggest that the significance of timing strongly influences what the fishermen were likely to say about their occupational experiences. More specifically, the topical material that enters into a conversation fits parameter of a social context. For example, one fisherman in the group expresses a memory of an event that holds an element within it that arouses a memory for someone else to present a comparable story. This is the organic nature of casual communication (xxiv).

Another point of appreciation regarding the Lake Erie project is that the authors specifically state that though their stance is related to fisheries policy it is influenced by what the fishermen express in dialogue; the objective of their research is to provide a venue for lifestyle awareness not a source of fact for the means of delivering evidence to debate across policy transitions. Lloyd and Mullen’s work not only addresses the themes that Acheson suggests should be included in fisheries anthropology but also fills in the basic outlined categories with more direct and detailed citations from interviewees. For example, there is a section in the book on myth and superstition:

Although experience, watchfulness, and weather reports or signs help to keep fishermen safe from the hazards of work on the lake, supernatural help can also be called upon.” This observation is followed by direct dialogue transcript: “JH: See these up here? You’ll see a penny behind

every one of these window braces. Every crew member comes out of the bay, he puts a penny up here. That way he's got something to bring him back. When they quit they take their penny with them (73).

In another section, there is discussion of the environmental water quality of the lake and how it has degraded over time, leaving a condition that is environmentally toxic. Lloyd and Mullen verify this observation by referring to two directly transcribed interview comments, one example is, "When I started, we didn't carry no drinking water. You had a can, a tin can with a string on it. You wanted a drink of water, you dipped it over and drank it. Can't do that today. Those chemicals in there would kill you" (89). The intention in including these examples is to suggest how research can use basic dialogue as a valid source of information.

This is an inspiring composition mode to address how to transition oral dialogue into a written format and keep the authentic voice of the interviewee. It is a way to integrate responses to specific research questions with existing findings in the larger field of research. Each page of the book contains almost entirely direct citations from the interviewees with basic pockets of descriptive context.

*Lake Erie Fishermen* contains 106 photos. The authors use these to illustrate what they also describe in words: the way the fishery works and the gear that is included. Though I did not include photos in my portraits, I accessed and described photos through the Cordova museum collection ("Visions from the Archives") in an attempt to illustrate with words how the community has transitioned from establishment in the late 1800s. My intention was to express as clearly as possible reflections observed in the photos including evidence of certain relationships between human subjects in the photos, indication of material property such as vehicles, hunting equipment, flags, evidence of specific behavior in community settings such as a cannery, parade or athletic game. The direct observation of images and associated composition makes my

research intentions (“Visions from the Archives”) comparable to what *Lake Erie Fishermen* provides regarding photography and imagery.

Anthropologist Michael Orbach wrote *Hunters, Seamen and Entrepreneurs* while working as a social anthropologist at the National Marine Fisheries Service in Washington DC. Currently he is Professor Emeritus in Marine Affairs and Policy at Duke University. He introduces the book by explaining the aim to conduct research as a “working participant in the fleet” (8) of tuna fishing boats in San Diego in order to achieve an accurate sense of the culture within the industry. Orbach’s book is more focused on the specific socio-cultural components of the fleet and details explaining how the fishery operates—rather than the relationship between the fleet and the physical community of San Diego. This is sensible for this fishery because the tuna boats fish off-shore often without returning to port for one to two months—time away from the community is extensive. Still, San Diego is the port of return. Orbach explains that even when the boats and crew are back to port, “the one audience to whom a fisherman can play without restraint is another fisherman” (272). This infers that though the individual may be “home” with family and acquaintances, the fisherman’s time on the water is a lifestyle dimension that inspires conversation. That extensive experience is the most available topic of discussion. This frequently recurring separation of physical setting creates “two separate on-going social processes—one at sea and one on shore” (273).

In Cordova, it was more important to look at the physical community and the relationship local residents (and other permit holders) have to the salmon fishery because the fishery is sited relatively close to the community. Still, Orbach’s specific descriptions of what the tuna seiner looks like, how the catch process works, how decision making occurs to make a set, how various strategies are used, how crew members were taught work skills, and how they were treated by



skippers were all useful example models for my writing. His work and findings match what Acheson argues need to be observed in the dimensions of fisheries anthropology and what they should incorporate.

Of these three books, Orbach's was the most structured and easiest to navigate to look for specific traits of a fleet. It fills in the details of what Acheson suggests looking for to characterize a particular fishery. For example, Orbach includes discussion of how seine gear returns to the fishing boat through an overhead block. He describes that "[a]ll kinds of sea life also come through the block and shower down on the heads of crewmen below... The worst of these small objects in terms of their annoyance value are the jellyfish" (53). He goes on to explain the stinging, poisonous jelly that impacts human skin. Similar observations from my work are difficult to assert because at the time of field research I did not consider them sources of notable information. Also, I am not simply witness to observations but socially aware of these features of a commercial fishing lifestyle as an active participant. The manner in which a drift-net is harvested on the back deck of a fishing boat and the implications of what comes with it (jellyfish, kelp, feathers, debris in the water) is so repetitive that it did not occur to me to record or take note of it. Similarly, I can think of many recurring seasonal events that define components of my own family and community: hauling the boat out of the water at the end of the summer season, family arrangements for the off-season months, net and gear replacement, vessel maintenance, finalizing crew appointments, seasonal oil spill response training, pre-season preparation for the boat. For others, considerations outside of salmon might be participation in other fisheries or other off-season employment.

While this form of composition may not be meaningful to a fisherman who is a participant in the industry, it is beneficial information to a person unfamiliar with the industry with the

intention to understand as much as possible about life on a tuna seiner. It also helps me appreciate why having an outside/ etic perspective may at times be more beneficial in providing accurate observational details at a fundamental level.

Courtland Smith's book acknowledges Oregon Sea Grant, the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, the Oregon Historical Society and several museums for contributions to *Salmon Fishers of the Columbia* (1979). This book explains the surge and collapse of salmon fishing in the Columbia River over approximately a century (1880-1980). It includes human commentary but much of it is from recordings, official proceedings, cataloged communications or public media from various museum holdings, not from direct interviews. It also refers to components of myth and storytelling related to salmon harvests from Native American culture prior to the arrival of white settlement, but these descriptions are brief. There is discussion of the different catch methods including salmon traps, fish wheels, seining and gill-netting and how closely related these harvest techniques were based on cannery preferences rather than individual fishermen. Everything is classified with informative charts and graphic descriptions from agencies such as the Bureau of Fisheries. Smith states, "a fishery and fishery management activities are part of human communities. These communities are composed of many different people, each trying to attain a variety of benefits" (2). The "community" structure, the commonality he references is occupational— "salmon fishermen" along the entirety of the Columbia River, not any specific land-based town or city.

Overall, this book is thorough and includes material adequate to accurately inform a reader of the history of salmon on the Columbia but the focus is on the fish, the economy, the processing procedures, the politics and administrative dimensions of access but not of the actual human beings who participated in fishery harvest throughout the century. There are a few passages that

resonated with the humanistic and experiential dimension related to salmon fishing, but they are mostly in the chapters that present the “fish fights” (91). This example shows one instance:

For many, the compensations of fishing were other than monetary...Fishing was a way for the individual to work out the conflict of man versus nature. It was a way of getting into one's self and working out personal problems. Fishing was a test of yourself and your capabilities. One salmon fisherman said, “When I come home, I am totally satisfied except I get really horny. Fishing uses everything I have—my mind, my body, my spirit (47).

Other book length literature that provide an anthropological, academic style analysis of particular fisheries are Carothers *Privatizing the Right to Fish: Challenges to Livelihood and Community in Kodiak, Alaska* (2008), Boxberger's *To Fish in Common. The Ethnohistory of Lummi Indian Salmon Fishing* (1989), Ommer et al. *World Fisheries. A Social-Ecological Analysis* (2011), Fricke's et al. *Seafarer and Community* (1973), Frye's *The Men All Singing: The Story of Menhaden Fishing*, Carothers et al.. *Fishing People of the North. Cultures, Economies and Management Responding to Change* (2012) and Smith et al. *Those who Live from the Sea* (1980).

In general, these texts are informative in providing specific historical background, social details and, in some cases, personal experience and awareness of lifestyle in various fishing communities nationally and internationally. However, research and composition objectives more typically seem to hold a political component related to resource access and quota rather than cultural dimensions of the occupation.

### 3.3 Category 3: Fisheries Culture in Literature

Three books strongly influenced the way I decided to transition interview transcripts into a portrait that, in most cases, excluded myself and the questions I asked. These were Terkel's

*Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, McCloskey's *Their Father's Work: Casting Nets with the World's Fishermen* and Peffer's *Watermen*. These examples differ from those previously mentioned because they do not include as detailed a sense of method and theory but rather focus on storytelling about occupational experience directly.

Though Terkel did not write specifically about fishing, he wrote about occupation and this is how it was resourceful as a model. For the book, he organized his interviewees by the type of employment they were engaged in and he presents the interview text primarily in the words of the speaker. He opens each portrait with a brief description of the person, where the interview took place and possibly some of the circumstances that might have influenced some of the conversation. "Conversation" is important to note, also. Terkel did not refer to his work as interviewing, but rather as conversation. Conversation and dialogue are dynamic interactions with another person. It makes the commentary he or she provides more believable and more personal. Terkel explains that very briefly in the introduction, "the talk was idiomatic rather than academic. It is not just a structured survey but time, even if very brief, to thoroughly listen to what the speaker wants to talk about. Each character portrait is composed in the first-person point of view though occasionally Terkel includes a question that he asks the interviewee in italics. There is no conclusion to the book; Terkel leaves it to the reader to interpret what the conversations mean about the topic of "work."

The characters represented many United States communities, not one specific location. The community feature that holds them together as a group is the simple reality that most Americans need employment of some kind, but even if they are talking about their employment they can refer to a much larger human experience that makes each person an individual. But, that

individual can share experiences, create all kinds of relationships both positive and negative, and interact in many different ways. Terkel does not spend much book space discussing this perspective but makes it clear by the nature of how he organized each portrait. This resonated with me and influenced the creation of my visual image of a net and web as a group of people each with individual stories but held together by some form of common interest. Occupation can serve as that commonality.

McCloskey, a novelist and nonfiction writer with personal history as a commercial fisherman and a member of the United States Coast Guard, created *Their Father's Work: Casting Nets with the World's Fishermen* to compare the industry of commercial fishing across the world. There are several chapters specifically related to Alaska communities. Though he refers to specific characters and uses direct quotations, most of the stories are composed with a journalistic tone. The stories are usually designed to share with the reader a specific incident, location, gear type or time frame. The concluding chapter, "To Fish," has a realistic tone and demonstrates the cultural meaning and value of fishing to some individuals. He explains at the completion of his research of fishermen from around the world, "for all their diversification the fishermen have a commonality of outlook and experience that sometimes makes them more brothers around the world than with others of their own countrymen" (352). This chapter, as a whole is a simplistic but very accurate representation of how many fishermen I know are so thoroughly engaged in the occupation of their life. He ends the chapter describing a fisherman standing on a wet deck, sparkling with sunshine and expressing, "wish I could fish a thousand years, like this." Then, a photo showing the interior of a seine boat with a small sign on the wall that states, "the worst day of fishing is better than the best day at work" (354).

This statement reminds me of Orbach's concluding chapter, "Community and Self-Image." Fishermen often have dual lives—home and on the water. Water time, especially at an international level, includes participation of individuals whose home addresses are diverse. McCloskey's chapter related to the Grand Banks in the Atlantic demonstrates this by listing all of the nationalities that at some point have targeted fish: "there came Icelanders, Greenlanders, Norwegians...Russians, Poles, Germans, Japanese, Bulgarians, Estonians, Latvians, Italians, Romanians, Cubans and Koreans" (75). This is true in Alaska in many cases when depending on where a permit is held, the location of the vessel during a particular season may be multiple days away from home. However, for the Cordova local residents who fish such a duality is not nearly as prevalent. The fishing location is proximal to home and family.

One chapter with particular relevance to this dissertation is "Knee Deep in Crude and Bullshit" related to the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill in Prince William Sound. McCloskey describes his various experiences in the communities of Valdez, Cordova and Kodiak as well as on board fishing boats and float planes observing aspects of the Spill. The written material is factually accurate; some of the names referenced are still members of the community of Cordova today and active members of statewide fishery organizations like United Fishermen of Alaska. The Reluctant Fisherman was the primary hotel used to house representatives for Exxon and it remains a central community social space with restaurant and lounge overlooking the Cordova harbor. The piece uses physical descriptions of some of the human characters and provides citations to show how they speak to the disaster. These are interesting to compare because they provide a tone for insider/ outsider status. For example, an Exxon representative is quoted as saying: "I'm not a spokesman. Never been to Alaska before. But I'll tell you, I think Exxon's doin' a wonderful job here" (61).

The excerpt above demonstrates a particular character perspective from an individual with an outside status who is required by occupation to process local claims. It is a brief but believable passage, likely unmodified by the author. It demonstrates that the spokesman does not understand the value of the commercial fishing industry to the community of Cordova and how much social stress and damage was being moderated at as a result of the oil spill.

In comparison to Terkel, however, McCloskey's style is more personal, and shows a closer and more direct relationship to the people he writes about. Terkel manages to remove himself from each of his interviewee stories. He does not always provide context for how conversation topics transpired or transcribe the kinds of questions he asked.

Peffer's *Waterman*, a nonfiction book with a focus on fishing in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, is based primarily on the author's personal experience of participating in the fisheries on a single boat, the Ruby Ford, with just one skipper through the course of a year of different fishing seasons. There is no explicit introduction to the book and the author, though directly engaged in the industry through a year, does not have a lifetime experience in the industry. Peffer begins by describing his first day dredging oysters in the Chesapeake Bay. He notes dialogue amongst the crew and himself combined with physical descriptions of the interior and exterior of the boat. The book explains the mechanics and politics of oyster dredging but does so not in an academic journal or report format, like the Acheson paper, more as a story.

In some cases, the language presented is spewed with profanity and I include the citation below because it demonstrates how much accuracy or true character can be portrayed when the citation is not from a direct, recorded interview. The words are more animated and even accent of the speaker is available. The language throughout the book has a very organic tone, it clearly comes from certain well-defined characters, but it is not directly cited from a transcript. This

feature is reminiscent of what I witnessed in regular occurrence on the fishing boats I visited for Cordova work—but not if I was interviewing in a more structured, recorded meeting. It is the casual language of life on the boat. Peffer reports the language of crew directly in a November outing when dangerous ice built up on the sides of the oyster boat (17):

*“Bernard swore: ‘Fuck this shit. Goddamn captain goin’ to drown me.’”*

*“You’re just a chickenshit nigger, it’s all you are, Bernard,” said Bobby. “Ain’t this little bid o’ water or Bart going to hurt you either bit.”*

*“What you know? You jus’ too goddamn dumb to worry. I drudged for asters fore you were born, and I seen all the dead niggers that washed up on this friggin’ shore come drudgin’ season. Some o’ them old captains throw’d niggers overboard for fun. This ain’t goddamn bath water, you know.”*

There is a later section of the book based on a conversation between Peffer and an eighty-year old woman, M’ada, who married a waterman and was mother to many of them also. The section provides direct citations from the dialogue but Peffer also uses his own observations within the home to create a sense of the setting. The setting itself had an influence on the way the conversation ensued. Peffer and M’ada discuss Chesapeake Bay and physical impacts of rough water events washing away the land. Peffer explains, “the old woman told me she had seen the Bay claim more than land. She told me about a Memorial Day Service instead of just paying tribute to the war dead, the islanders gathered to honor fourteen Tlighman watermen lost on the Bay... This was not the kind of lore I liked hearing and I saw that the subject had made M’ada uneasy, too. Maybe it was just the bitter weather that made our conversation take its dark turn (61).” Peffer’s interpretation of what he heard and a relationship he describes between bitter weather and dark conversation is more than simple, objective reporting. His identity, personal character, directly influences the tone of the conversation.



Overall, this book thoroughly addresses the human component of the industry. One of my favorite passages is in his description of the interior of the boat at work, “Ruby Ford stank—kerosene, coffee, bacon, eggs, toast, grits, and humanity” (13). Finally, there is a sense of nostalgia from the author who ends the final chapter of taking the boat, Ruby Ford, through a year of work, “The skipjack race would be coming soon. I would not be making that race. I would return to teaching because I love it the way Bart Murphy loves standing at the wheel of the Ruby Ford. But I was turning back ashore with a gratitude for the time I had spent on the water...my romance with the waterman’s life remained. I had found friends and heritage” (195).

### 3.4 Literature Review of Additional Composition Formats

There are several additional examples of literature I referred to regularly as models for fisheries and storytelling that are not distinctly ethnography but non-fiction. Two that I will review here as examples are: Shields’ *Salt of the Sea. The Pacific Coast Cod Fishery and the Last Days of Sail* (2001) and Bender’s *Catching the Ebb. Drift-Fishing for a Life in Cook Inlet* (2008).

Both the Shields and Bender books are autobiographical though Shields is more formal and includes more background history on the fishery specifically and has a more objective tone. The book is generally based on the author’s experience and memory of west coast and Alaska cod fishing in the era of sailboats. Self-described he writes, “after I finished high school in 1934, I made my first five-month voyage to the Bering Sea...I have therefore firsthand information on this industry, gained from personal experience with the men who followed the fishery along with my own experience as a crew member” (Shields, 2001, 9). Shields grew up in Seattle, Washington and in this era, most of the vessels participating in this industry travelled from major

fishing ports on the west coast such as San Francisco, Humboldt Bay in northern California, Astoria, Oregon and the general Puget Sound region of Washington.

Shields refers to conversations with participating fishermen who apparently described many dimensions and specifics of the fishery including details such as: what kind of groceries were stocked, what the navigational equipment looked like and how it was securely stored<sup>3</sup>, the different roles of crew and deckhands (cook, engineer, captain), the general timing for the various tasks of the day, various landmarks both during travel and fishing times, seasonal variations and implications for the vessel and crew, processing the cod once the salted product returned to the southern ports. Shields collected material for the informative stories from fishermen, but they are not directly quoted or cited. There is almost no bibliography to the entire document but one thing he does include regularly are references to ship's log books—the notes of the captain normally detailing location of the boat, weather descriptions, timing of actively fishing, observations of other schooners in sight. An appendix as an example for the reader is included (219). There are many photos included, as well. Some are personal and others are credited to deckhands in the various vessel stories. It is clear from these that they were taken to help document the experience of fishing.

Bender's *Catching the Ebb* resonates to me in several ways. On a personal level, he describes many components of the Kenai Peninsula: geographically, culturally, environmentally and in general terms of the occupation of the commercial salmon industry. He points out the role the

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<sup>3</sup> Storage details are important because in the era when this was written gear included bulky items such as chronometers, sextants and navigation tables. On a sailboat, the "heel" of the boat can be quite extreme and these things would need to be kept securely together.

canneries once had in the fisheries and many of the port and community locations where the remains of the old canneries can still be found: Kenai, Kasilof, Ninilchik, Homer (Bender, 2008, 25). Those remains refer to transitions in the commercial history of the region from approximately just pre-statehood and the role of salmon traps (banned with statehood) and the transition then to independent commercial operations including set-nets, drift-boats and seiners. Like my work, he refers to the constant role of transitions. For example, “[f]ishing communities that had centered around life at the canneries began to disperse. With their bigger, more powerful boats, fishermen became more independent. They no longer needed to rely on help or services from the canneries’ tenders...many fishermen no longer lived at the canneries but commuted from their permanent homes” (37).

Like Shields book, Bender’s has many references to particular areas of water or weather conditions that create trials for fishing boats. For example, he mentions the role of the tide in Cook Inlet, “...we began to make out the Homer Spit and, ever so slowly, inched our way toward it. Even with the powerful engines of today, you try your best to avoid making that run against the tide” (60). Reference to the tide, in general, is a powerful and fairly depressing component of the book as a whole because the “ebb tide” is the period when the water runs away from the shore—leading to low tide. In Bender’s words, “the way of life that I commemorate here began in the 1870s, was revived in the late 1940s, and thrived for another half century, but I can’t imagine a tide that will lift it again” (61). In other words, Cook Inlet presents an array of features that hold a quite negative quality for the drift-fleet itself. He mentions the “enlarged human population,” the “conflicts of competing interests between the sport, subsistence and commercial fishermen,” “the depressed market for wild salmon” (61) as examples. This is not the same kind of commentary or opinion that was expressed to me in my experience in Cordova.

For example, see the “Old Salt” portrait where the individual expresses many transitions he has witnessed in the industry some, quite dire such as the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. The Old Salt discusses the impacts of that, but still expresses his participation in the general fishery with a more light-hearted tone. In Bender’s piece there is a sense of nostalgia that seems unretainable that was not the case in my interviews. However, the feature of “autobiographical” may influence this. *Catching the Ebb* is one individual’s experience, not an attempt to explain the role of the fishery as a feature of community identity.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The examples in this chapter demonstrate different ways that fisheries research and anthropology can be combined. Each branch is useful for different purposes. Objectivity for policy analysis is important in order to be judiciously fair regarding access to fish but texts specifically meant for that purpose do not contribute a sense of identity or culture of the fishermen and they do not need to. The strictly anthropological texts are informative and often include more specific details of the industry than the policy texts, but the author typically still expresses observations and findings as an external view to the community he or she studies. In this literature, a benefit to the reader or researcher is that the texts are generally organized in a standard methodical style. Literature in the third branch is typically motivated by interests of the author. It is often less formal than the anthropology specific case studies but also provides some of the most personal awareness of culture within the industry. Sometimes the material within these texts emerges irregularly; they are not necessarily structured as precisely and categorically as academic studies and include qualitative observations or experiences of the author that are not necessarily delineated or bound by a simple publication format.

For the purpose of fisheries and maritime anthropology as a storytelling and communication tool, this final category is generally where my compositions fit best. The stories I include are also not sterilized or conveyed with an authorial perspective that removes my own identity as closely correlated to the industry and community members I interviewed.

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## Chapter 4: Prince William Sound Salmon: Ecology, Humans, Fisheries

This chapter provides a basic overview of the social, ecological and historical features that define Prince William Sound salmon fisheries and how they have influenced the community identity of Cordova, Alaska. As an early and distinguished scholar of the region Frederica de Laguna remarked: “to understand the customs and history of any people we must study the environment in which they live and which has helped shape their destinies” (de Laguna 1972, 21). This is true regardless of the era in which the people live—the environment is as important to Cordova residents today as it was to residents hundreds of years ago. The local setting, the place and the benefits and challenges of what it offers all contribute to Cordova residents’ local identity and how it has transitioned through time.

The first part of this chapter (Part I) presents background information on Prince William Sound as an evolving social-ecological system, the interplay of its biogeography, fisheries ecology, communities, and the timeline of events that led up to the contemporary commercial fishing setting in the region. Details of the contemporary setting, including the operation of commercial fisheries, are explored in part two (Part II).

### Part I

#### 4.1 Geography

Prince William Sound is in South Central Alaska, east of the Kenai Peninsula and primarily west of the Bering River. It is a “semi-enclosed fjord estuary” (Harwell et al., 2010, 672) with a productive ecosystem supporting many species of seabirds, marine mammals and fish. The region incorporates 3,800 miles of coastline and is surrounded by the Chugach National Forest. Beyond the forests, it is surrounded by the Chugach Mountains at heights of

8,000-10,000 feet and the Alaska Range beyond that. While the marine region of the Sound provides substantial opportunities for harvest, human access to the area still proves a challenge. The largest community in the area is Valdez, terminus of the Alaska Pipeline. That community is accessible by road; getting anywhere else requires access by commercial flights, the Alaska marine transportation system, a personal vessel or plane.

The U.S. Coast Pilot provides detailed standard conditions related to the entire Gulf Coast of Alaska and includes information specific to many particular areas. “Precipitation along the coast is greatly influenced by topography—for example, in Valdez (much like Cordova, a community surrounded by mountains), there is an average of 67 inches of rain in January. Cordova’s mean number of days with precipitation is 259, an average of about 20 days/ month. The average annual precipitation is almost 96 inches (U.S. Coast Pilot, 2014, 9, 119, 473, 139).

#### 4.2 Physical Characteristics of the Copper River Basin

Geophysical characteristics of the river are important to acknowledge because they contribute to what makes it a complex salmon habitat. The delta is impermanent and fluctuates annually depending on up-water seasonal conditions. This description explains some of the intricacy:

At approximately 63,000 km<sup>2</sup> (24,400 mi<sup>2</sup>), the Copper River is not only the largest drainage basin in the Gulf of Alaska region but it is also the sixth largest in the State of Alaska. Starting on the northeast flanks of Mt. Wrangell at the Copper Glacier, the Copper River flows generally southward 462 km (287 mi) to the Gulf of Alaska, 24 km (15 mi) east of Cordova. The Alaska Range to the north, the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountains to the east, and the Talkeetna Mountains to the west bound the headwaters of the Copper River. The Copper is the only river that bisects the Chugach Mountains. Along its upper course, many high mountain

glacial streams contribute to the river. In 1995, approximately 18% of the Copper River basin consisted of glaciers. Despite ranking sixth in basin area, the average discharge of 1,600 m<sup>3</sup>/s (57,400 cfs) ranks second behind only the Yukon River. (Bowersox, 2002, 3).

The glacial drainages contain consistent sedimentation; this makes the mainstream of the river very cloudy—it is difficult (or impossible) to conduct aerial surveys for salmon monitoring. Also, as noted in the Bowersox quote, the river discharge is rapid and according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) website it is the most turbulent river in Alaska where sonar is used to detect fish. The Miles Glacier sonar, the primary ADFG tool to track sockeye salmon escapement, is challenged by other environmental features of the river and climate—at times ice remains in the river when the fishery opens in May. Or, the road approximately 45 miles from Cordova is impassable because it is still covered by snow. This can delay the agency set-up of the operation.

The headwaters of the Copper River begin at the terminus of the Copper Glacier on Mount Wrangell, approximately 300 miles upstream. Over 2.5 million salmon return to the river system each year. Copper River sockeye salmon represent fish from many distinct “stocks” of sockeye salmon; 33 delta stocks, 105 upriver stocks and sockeye salmon from three hatchery release sites. Some of the largest tributary rivers include: the Slana, Gakona, Gulkana, Tazlina, Klutina, Tonsina, and Chitina Rivers. The lengths of the tributary rivers add physical travel distance and hence, fat and nutritional storage needs for the salmon because the fish do not eat during spawning migration. This biological detail is a nutritional benefit to human consumers of the fish stocks because commercially caught salmon are harvested just prior to the river migration phase of life when the animal has the largest amount of fat and oils stored.

Salmon begin to return to the Copper River in late April, although the bulk of the run commences late in the second week of May, when Chinook and sockeye salmon arrive in large numbers. By early July, the kings are up-stream, and by late July, the various runs of red salmon are almost over, and the coho start to arrive. By mid-August, coho salmon dominate, and except for the few late-run coho, the salmon season is over by late September.

#### 4.3 Early History, Prince William Sound: Pre-1900 Interaction of Native Groups in Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska

The Sound is a culturally blended region in Alaska. As Guedon explains, “Prince William Sound is a key area in the development of the Pacific Coastal cultures and must have been a well-populated and culturally complex center of activity for many millennia” (2004, 54). This makes sense in regard to current reference material that sets Kodiak, the outer Gulf Coast and Prince William Sound into a single region referred to as Sugpiaq/ Alutiiq (Crowell, 2001, 4). It was an area of intersection linking culture and geography to the extent that the original cultures are now interrelated and Sugpiaq appears to fit what were once more differentiated ethnic groups.

Other research (Ganley and Wheeler, 2012, for example) suggests that the Sound was a very isolated location pre-Russian contact and was inhabited almost exclusively by small Chugach communities from the western Chenega district to Kayak Island, outside of the Sound itself and south east of the Copper River. The glaciers and mountains that surround the Sound also provided a geographical dimension of impassibility. The Cordova location was an exception to this. The Copper River region was a small traditional Eyak heritage site. Some specific descriptions of Eyak heritage are identified directly in Birket-Smith and De Laguna’s *The Eyak*

*Indians of the Copper River Delta, Alaska* (1938). The records they share are very straightforward and include observations and careful reports on topics such as: “village sites, houses, boats, sleds, snowshoes, dogs, personal adornment and clothing, tools and techniques and more” (1). These are followed by social and intellectual cultural description, Eyak folklore and finally, an analysis of these varied features. Their basic analysis begins with the general opinion, the Copper River region is complex because it occupies a large region of the state both in the interior and coast and was a mixing ground for several Native groups.

A linguist who has looked closely into Eyak history is Michael Krauss, Professor Emeritus at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. In his book *In Honor of Eyak: The Art of Anna Nelson Harry* (1982), Krauss presents ten texts to demonstrate what he witnessed and defined as “a sample of Anna’s storytelling art” (19). It is a very structured collection and includes “every sentence, every word, every sentence fragment, every word fragment, false start, interruption, repetition, all unfinished or garbled pieces...because that is what unrehearsed speech is full of in actual performance” (21). What is presented in this book is not so much an example of Nelson Harry’s personal life experience, but rather stories that demonstrate intricate connections between Harry and the larger experience of the Eyak people both from Cordova region as well as Yakutat, significantly farther to the south east. Through these stories he is able to demonstrate identities, relationships, values and emotions of this cultural group. As he states, “the real truth and meaning of Eyak history as told to us by Anna here go far beyond the factual, to the personal and spiritual” (145). Though collected history still may be sparse, what does exist is meaningful to acknowledge. There is clearly depth to the identity of the Eyak culture, it is not “meager” precisely, but documentation is perhaps more sparse than some of the other cultural entities in the state.

Following Russian contact, cultural details became difficult to clarify. Terminology, naming and renaming of different groups and acceptance or rejection of varied linguistic distinctions contributed to regional complexity. The Russian influence on the region impacted and blurred the cultural heritage zones between the Chugach and the Eyak (Krauss, 2006, 173). “At the other end of known Eyak territory, however, we have plentiful evidence that Yakutat Bay was still (partly) Eyak” (174). However, that is no longer accurate today, the location of Yakutat is regarded as Tlingit. Yakutat is not located in Prince William Sound and it is substantially farther south in the Gulf of Alaska. When a “cannery was opened at what is now Cordova between 1884 and 1890, and by the end of the century...they (the Eyak) had almost ceased to exist as a separate tribal entity” (Birket-Smith and De Laguna, 361). The Eyak population is still relatively small in comparison to other Alaska Native populations. According to the Alaska Native Language Center website ([www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/ey/](http://www.uaf.edu/anlc/languages/ey/)), “the Eyak are represented by about 50 people but no surviving fluent speakers. The last remaining native speaker of Eyak died in 2008.” According to the United States Census, the total population for Valdez-Cordova Census Area in 2018 was approximately 9,164. American Indians and Alaska Natives alone (including Eyak and other entities) represented 13.9% of the population (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/valdezcordovacensusareaalaska/RHI325217>).

#### 4.4 Prince William Sound Villages

The early Native villages of Prince William Sound were Nuchek, Kiniklik, Eyak sites (“Old Town” and Alaganik, summer fish camp), Tatitlek and Chenega. Nuchek, located on Hinchinbrook Island, was established by Russian exploration as a convenient port before the technology of steam engines made it possible to more easily access interior regions of the

Sound. Nuchek was a fur trading port (Ketz and Arndt, 2010), not an original Alaska Native settlement. However, Native people from other parts of the Sound moved to Nuchek until approximately 1867 when the Native residents began to return to their original village sites of Tatitlek and Chenega.” (Langdon, 2002, 45). Nuchek steadily declined in population until community property was eventually transferred to the Chugach National Forest. Kiniklik was a Native village abandoned around 1930. Both Chenega and Tatitlek still exist, though the original village of Chenega was destroyed by a tsunami resulting from the 1964 Earthquake and the residents resettled a new village site nearby.

In the Cordova area, the Eyak people settled along the shores of Eyak Lake, a site that is now referred to as “Old Town,” several miles inland from the coast. “In former (pre-1938) times, the Eyak territory extended from Cordova Bay inside the eastern edge of Prince William Sound, to the Martin River” (Birket-Smith and de Laguna, 1938, 2) which drains into the Copper River Delta. The Egg Islands (the Barrier Islands closest to Strawberry Point and Cordova) were a location for sea otter hunting but that region, although very close, was apportioned and settled by Sugpiaq/ Aluttiq with the villages located on Hinchinbrook and Hawkins Islands.

Birket-Smith and De Laguna also emphasize the Eyak harvest of clams at Point Whitshed—the same area where residents harvested clams until the 1964 earthquake caused a substantial geologic shift. There was a small “fishing station” at Alaganik on the Delta. Due to an epidemic in 1892 or 1893, Alaganik was abandoned and the remaining Eyak moved to “Old Town” (Birket-Smith and De Laguna, 21).

On the east side of the Copper River watershed system, the community of Katalla was established in Tlingit region and affiliated with the Native community of Yakutat farther south on the coast of Alaska. Katalla is now abandoned but is well-known as the location of the first



oil drilling in Alaska territory. The drill burned down on Christmas Day in 1933 but “over its lifetime (1904-1933) the oil field produced 154,000 barrels of oil” (Lethcoe, 2001, 62).

#### 4.5 Other Prospects: Cordova as “Copper Gateway” of Alaska

The prospects for copper mining from the Kennecott and McCarthy regions north of Cordova was what pushed Cordova’s settlement and development in the early 1900’s. The copper mines encouraged substantial investment in Alaska and Cordova offered a protective anchorage and harbor.

Construction of the railroad began in 1904 by Michael Heney who had constructed the White Pass and Yukon Railroad (Lethcoe, 2001, 61, 63). Heney purchased the land right of way for the railroad but sold it to the Morgan-Guggenheim Alaska Syndicate after that organization had originally started a railway from Katalla that was destroyed in a storm (Nielsen, 1983, 2). The first load of copper arrived in Cordova on April 8, 1911 (Lethcoe, 66).

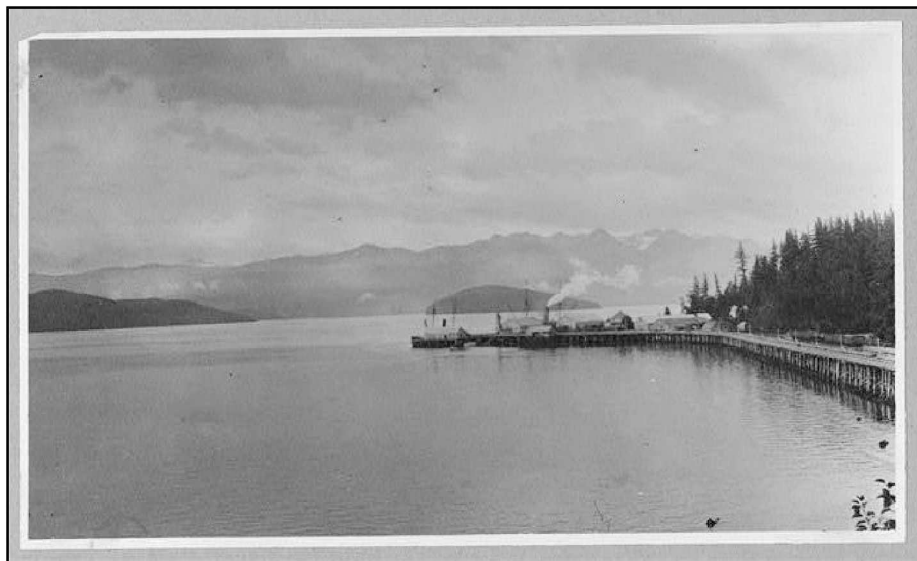


Figure 2: Cordova Railroad port (Library of Congress)

The mines closed in 1938 and eventually rail repairs were unfeasible. The crossing at Miles Glacier is now referred to as “The Million Dollar Bridge” because of the high cost to build and maintain. Cordova is no longer accessible by rail and there is no highway connection to other Alaska road systems with the exception of vehicles traveling by the Alaska Marine Highway System<sup>4</sup>.

Currently, the relationship between the abandoned copper mines and the contemporary culture of Cordova are minimal. However, the history is evident. For example, there is a pipe organ in one of the local bars, salvaged from the Kennecott Mine. It is not functional but provides a sense of commemoration, as do exhibits and stored material at the museum. The old railroad bed was used to create the road from Cordova to Mile 36 where there is a bridge that is no longer suitable for traffic. For additional overview of some of Cordova’s early history see: (Christensen et al. 2000).

In consideration to verify ethnic dimensions of the Copper River drift-fleet, specifically the Russian Old Believer community, I looked into the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry database (<https://www.cfec.state.ak.us/plook/#permits>). There, by researching permit holders by zip codes where this cultural group tends to live (examples include: Homer: 99603 or Wasilla: 99687) and my general familiarity with typical surnames (such as Reutov, Polushkin, Basargin, Matveev, Fefelov), I was able to get a comparable sense of the quantity of permits held by Russian Old Believers. In Homer (99603), there are 55 permit holders listed for 2019 for the

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<sup>4</sup> The ferry system.

S03E fishery, 36 of these have surnames such as those mentioned above. In Wasilla (99687), there are 21 with these commonalities. There is some admitted inaccuracy to this because it includes unverified assumptions about individual surnames.

#### 4.6 Early Salmon Packing

The first major fish processing plants were primarily built as salmon canneries but also served as herring salteries in other seasons. They were located in Orca Inlet, an early port location in the general vicinity of the existing community of Cordova. There were four operations in the area and the total salmon volume for 1880 was 76,998 cases (Freeburn, 1976). The preliminary and most enduring cannery was the Alaska Packers Association, based out of Seattle.

Initially, there were two primary labor components for the canneries—hired fishermen and cannery laborers/ processors. All sectors of the industry were owned and operated by the cannery itself; fishermen did not sell to the cannery under contract like they do now. Early cannery work was entirely manual labor and employees were typically imported for seasonal operations. “The 1890 Census reported that of the 4,298 white inhabitants in Alaska, 2,277 were itinerants mostly employed in the cannery industry” (Sandburg, 2013, 9). Many laborers were Chinese, hired from the port of San Francisco; these workers conducted much of the lowest level labor of fish cleaning and trimming. By 1904, Seattle manufacturers were promoting the so-called “Iron Chink”—machinery that eliminated the need for manual fish cleaning and, thus, for hiring Chinese laborers. Cannery employment was not limited to men. In many cases it was a significant source of income more typical for women in a community (see portrait “Fish Mom”).

#### 4.7 Salmon Traps and Management in the Early 1900's

Pre-statehood, natural resources in the territory of Alaska were managed by the federal government. An extensive description of the management process can be found in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Research Bulletin titled “The Commercial Salmon Fishery in Alaska” with authors Clark et al. (2006). This piece describes the various United States congressional acts related to transitions in salmon management. Details and regulatory measures materialized based on a series of historical issues: purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867, establishment of the first federally owned salmon saltery in 1868 (2006, 1), establishment of the first salmon cannery in 1869, salmon over harvest issues and increase in state resident employment within the industry through World War II times, fish trap ownership of Alaska residents compared to large canning companies. Finally, Clark et al. refer to a 1960 speech in which Senator Ernest Gruening states: “had it not been for the Federal Government’s neglecting and permitting the abuse of the salmon fisheries resource of Alaska, they would today constitute a great and rich heritage for this and future generations” (3). This piece and others that describe the intricate details of transition in this era of salmon in Alaska are important to acknowledge because they provide a longer historical interpretation of the fishery and though fishing in these varied manners may have been important to Cordova residents; it does not imply that Copper River red salmon were always prioritized.

In the era of commercial salmon traps, there were two types of traps: shore-based and floating. Many of the shore-based traps were installed and monitored by external processing agencies. One of the largest was the Hubbell and Waller Engineering Corporation based out of Seattle, Washington (see “Fish Traps and Statehood” portrait). The traps were designed to let

salmon swim easily into the holding areas but the primary corridor of entry was not easy to swim out of (see Figure 3 below).

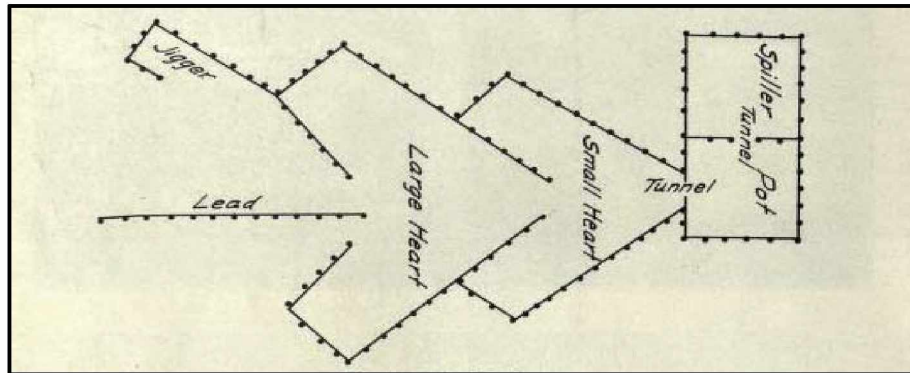


Figure 3: "Plan of typical Alaska fish trap" (Jones, 1915)

In a report describing fisheries in Alaska, Jones (1914) presented an early assessment of federal management of territorial salmon fisheries: “any division of authority between the Department of Commerce and officials of the Territory of Alaska in administering the Alaska fisheries laws would be detrimental to the salmon and other industries ... it is my honest belief that full Federal control of the fisheries of Alaska ... will result most beneficially to all interests concerned” (Jones, 6).

Later in the same report, Jones presents the benefits and consequences of the trap process. He acknowledges two consequences to the harvest method: 1) that traps catch more than just salmon and no other species is harvested or released—hence, traps cause bycatch mortality and 2) a “popular objection to the trap is the fact that it fishes day and night, and thus takes too many fish, but this objection is without merit, for the function of a trap is to catch fish” (Jones, 6). Clearly, overfishing was not a concern on the part of the government at the time.

Another benefit of the fish trap technology that Jones addressed in this report is the feature that fish stay in the water until they can be retrieved by processor employees and therefore, spend less time out of the water than fish harvested with other methods. This is credible today; penning live fish keeps them in prime condition until moments before they are processed. One advantage of salmon farming is that it allows a similar close pairing of harvest and processing. However, the historic traps did not have a method of regulating harvest so the fish would perpetually swim into the trap and this feature, unmonitored harvest volumes, is not a component of the trap that would be acceptable to contemporary management.

During World War II, salmon regulation was relatively passive due both to the unavoidable distraction of war and intent to increase national canned food production. In Alaska, salmon was the “economic backbone of the territory” but most of the income returned to the southern companies that facilitated production and management of the operations. “Of the 434 licensed traps in 1948, 38 (9%) belonged to Alaska residents while 245 (56%) were owned by the 8 largest canning companies” (Clark et al., 2006, *citing Regnart*, 3).

Alaska obtained Statehood in 1959 and it is commonly mentioned that elimination of salmon traps was a primary and prioritized state objective. The ban on salmon traps is addressed in Ordinance 3 referenced in the Alaska Constitution, Article XV, Section 24. The salmon fisheries of the early 1960’s were at record low harvests and were described as “neglected and abused” by the federal government (Clark et al., 2006). Political commentary in early statehood expressed offense at federal mismanagement of state salmon resources. Production in 1959 had dropped to its lowest level in 60 years. Disheartening citations from Governor Egan and Senator

Gruening blamed federal manipulation of stock management for the threatened stocks across the state.

#### 4.8 A Notorious Legacy of March: Good Fridays?

Two more recent environmental events have instigated substantive changes in local fisheries and community lifestyle: an earthquake in 1964 and an oil spill in 1989. The impacts of these events have generated extensive research and analytical documentation. An interesting coincidence: both events occurred on Good Friday, 25 years apart.

##### 1964 Earthquake

On March 27, 1964 a 9.2 earthquake with the epicenter in Prince William Sound shook Alaska. A trans-oceanic tsunami occurred immediately afterwards with impacts noticeable as far away as Japan, Chile and Hawaii. The highest tsunami waves were recorded near Valdez, Alaska but there were several communities that suffered serious destruction from the tidal wave. The entire community of Chenega was destroyed and approximately 30% of its residents were killed. The Whittier waterfront and harbor were seriously impacted and the community registered many fatalities. Valdez and Seward had serious impacts as well. Most of the fatalities recorded in the state were a result of the tsunamis.

In Cordova some of the lasting impacts included landscape alterations that wiped out the large commercial razor clam fishery (which had been a pillar to the local economy for most of the 1900's), destroyed Cordova's notorious Million Dollar Bridge (Kachadoorian, 1967), and caused substantial uplift of the community harbor seafloor. The changed water level may have impacted the size and draft of vessels that could then utilize it.

## 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill incident occurred on Bligh Reef on March 24, 1989 shortly after midnight. Two crew members were in control of the ship when it ran aground at a speed of 12 knots. The vessel course had deviated from normal traffic routes to avoid glacial ice. The vessel was in a very unstable position and the USCG along with Exxon salvage officials worked to remove the remaining cargo before it too spilled and before the vessel could not be salvaged from the rock shelf (Hodgson, 1990, 11). The cleaning equipment initially available was prepared to attend to a spill of 1,000-2,000 barrels and “was employed to combat an oil spill approximately 175 times larger” (11). The United States Coast Guard arrived on scene at approximately one in the morning. Their primary goal was to stabilize the vessel from completely capsizing and then, to transfer remaining oil onto another vessel, the Exxon *Baton Rouge* with the USCG. The spill released approximately 11 million gallons of North Slope Crude oil into the Sound resulting in one of the largest spills in US tanker history.

The impacts of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS), both environmentally and socially were immense. Research and publication of data and findings post-event expanded rapidly as the ecosystem was placed in jeopardy, but like other historic occasions it is obvious that efforts and awareness have tapered. However, the Alaska Department of Conservation and the USCG jointly composed a Prince William Sound Management Plan in the fall of 2018 to provide pre-existing awareness of what is necessary to consider should something like the 1989 oil spill occur again.

Cordova was the closest community affected in various ways. There was an enormous increase in demand for housing, lodging and food services—Cordova was not (and still is not) a community with significant tourism services. Currently, there are two relatively large hotels The



Reluctant Fisherman Inn and The Prince William, though at the time, likely just one<sup>5</sup>, and very few restaurants in the community. The larger salmon industry in the years immediately post-event was also impacted due to unrelated marketing difficulties, namely an increase in the international farmed salmon industry. Sockeye harvests also generally declined in the 1990's, in statistics shared by Dr. Gunnar Knapp in a presentation he shared at the ComFish Kodiak conference of 2012. This created economic disruption to fishermen and canneries. Some research has been conducted particularly on social and psychological stress impacts to the community immediately post-spill (Picou 1990, Brelsford et. al 1992, Ritchie 2004, Bushell and Jones 2009).

## Part II

### 4.9 Contemporary Prince William Sound Commercial Salmon

Five species of Pacific salmon, *Oncorhynchus nerka* (aka sockeye, red), *O. tshawytscha* (aka Chinook, king), *O. gorbuscha* (aka humpies, pink), *O. keta* (chum, dog), and *O. kisutch* (coho, silver), are important subsistence and commercial resources in the state waters of Alaska. The two primary species for commercial harvest in Prince William Sound are sockeye and pink salmon. Pink salmon are native to Prince William Sound but the majority of landings in the commercial fishery for those species are hatchery-produced and not entirely natural to the region.

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<sup>5</sup> I have confirmed this anecdotally from an acquaintance who grew up in Cordova.

The history of species management has fluctuated since Alaska became a US territory. Early federal regulations were created in an effort to preserve salmon species in the territory of Alaska, including the pre-1900 Alaska Salmon Fisheries Act “and this prohibited the erection of dams, barriers or other obstructions for the purpose of impeding salmon migrations” (Clark, et al., 2006, 2). Eventual amendments included banning commercial fishing in streams less than 500 feet wide and requiring canneries to report harvest information. The Bureau of Fisheries was established in 1903 with the responsibility for management of fisheries in Alaska. Though other territories did receive some limited authority for fisheries regulation, Alaska was an exception until 1960—one year post-statehood.

#### 4.10 Commercial Fisheries Limited Entry

In 1972, Alaska residents voted to amend the State Constitution to allow for a restriction on entry to Alaska’s fisheries for certain purposes: conservation, prevention of economic distress and promotion of aquaculture. The constitution states:

No exclusive right or special privilege of fishery shall be created or authorized in the natural waters of the State. *This section does not restrict the power of the State to limit entry into any fishery for purposes of resource conservation, to prevent economic distress among fishermen and those dependent upon them for a livelihood and to promote the efficient development of aquaculture in the State* (Alaska State Constitution, Article VIII, Section 15)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

The Limited Entry law (Alaska Senate Bill No. 39) was enacted in 1973. At the time leading up to implementation, some key features of the program were to 1) require issuance to local persons only, 2) prohibit permit leasing, 3) prevent the use of permits as collateral for loans, and 4) allow for free transferability (Homan, 2006). Initially, a commission was formed to design the program by area and establish an appropriate limit on the quantity of each type of gear (for example: set net, gill-net, seine) in the area. Features the commission considered when awarding permits included: degree of dependence on the fishery including past earnings and gear investment, extent of the person's past participation and ability to participate actively in the industry. According to the Homan presentation at a NOAA conference in 2006 (see bibliography for website), there was significant opposition and litigation related to this transition. Unsuccessful arguments were made that it was not constitutionally appropriate to restrain residents from a previously open-access industry, more specifically that creating limited entry was an unfair imposition. Two cases Homan refers to are the State vs. Ostrosky (1983) and John vs. Alaska CFEC (1988).

Though access rights may be of legitimate concern to Cordova, a community cannot regulate who does or does not have right to a permit. In Cordova, residents express concern about this topic because they often refer to the Copper River salmon industry as "their" fishery. Often, during interviews residents spontaneously suggested the concept of local "ownership" of the industry is a commonly held notion. This is an example of how the Copper River serves as a symbol of community to for the local residents. According to personal communication collected from committee member Dr. Keith Criddle, Professor of Fisheries and Ocean Science at the University of Alaska on March 11, 2017:

*Of greater importance than political will is the need to surmount legal hurdles in the Alaska State Constitution, the Limited Entry Act, and US Constitutional*

*prohibitions against discrimination against residents of other states. Limited entry has been combined with super-exclusive registration in some other fisheries to tilt the playing field to disadvantage non-locals, it is unlikely to be effective in fisheries like Cordova's that are high volume and compressed season. Tribal rights are another possible avenue (although that would require reinterpretation of ANCSA and ANILCA and would be of limited direct benefit to nonnative communities such as Cordova) (Criddle, 2017).*

Apprehension regarding decline in access to permits is something I have discussed with permit brokers in Homer and Cordova. In both locations, brokers confirmed that there is a transition in how the permit market has changed over the past decade or so. As permits are put onto the market, they seem to be more likely to be purchased from someone outside of the community. Although Cordova residents (at least those who have the zip code listed for their permit information as 99574) still maintain the large majority of the permits in the fishery, this number is in decline. Table 1 illustrates how community access numbers have changed in both Cordova and Homer:

Table 1. Changes in S03E (Prince William Sound salmon gill-net) LEP permit holdings in Cordova and Homer (data from AK CFEC Permit Database: <https://www.cfec.state.ak.us>)

Year (Total)	S03E Permits Cordova (99574)	S03E Permits Homer (99603)
2019 (582)	247	56
2018 (675)	283	72
2015 (652)	300	74
2014 (679)	311	63
2000 (644)	307	47
1990 (611)	311	34
1980 (611)	356	15

The first year that Cordova did not own more than 50 percent of the Prince William Sound drift permits was 2014. The quantities for this chart are from Alaska’s Commercial Fishery Entry Commission (CFEC) described below in more detail.

#### 4.11 Non-local Industry Participation in the Copper River Drift-Fleet

Many of the non-local permit holders are closely connected to the community residents and maintain long-standing ties to local fishermen and organizations such as the Cordova District Fishermen United (CDFU). For example, in 2013 during a summer visit to Cordova to observe the start of the season, I stayed with a friend (“JP”) at the home of an older married couple. During the summer, this couple casually provide in-town accommodations to a radio group of five adults who operate vessels in the S03E fishery but do not live in Cordova during other times of the year.

A radio group is a collection of fishermen who share information about what they witness on the water during the time of harvest through radio communication. In many cases, the group also shares a spotter pilot in a small personal plane who can look for fish from the air. It is beneficial to be a part of a group like this because fishermen can be harvesting in different sections of an open area and can hear how the fishery is progressing somewhere they cannot observe directly.

The following are examples of some of the phrases you might hear in their dialogue. One thing that is notable about this communication is the brevity and informality of the discussion. It is a casual mode to share concise but significant observations:

*“Guess I’ll follow the rip up and see if there’s anything up there.”*

*“I don’t know if we’re going to float or put “it in gear.”*

*“I’m just off the Grass Can—might head to the Kok Can.”*

*“We’re west of the Kok Can.”*

*“We’re up and going for a cruise.”*

*“Give it some gas.”*

*“It’s pretty quiet down here—but I did see one hit the air so there are signs of life.”*

*“How’s it going? Do you see anybody picking back there?”*

*“There’s no real gear until Horseshoe.”*

*“Looks like they’re kind of marching slowly to the east.”*

*“Kinda just hanging and waiting.”*

There are social dimensions that may influence the composition of a radio group. This could include family relationships or other friendships with people who have an interest in sharing information about their observations on the fishing grounds. Another consideration for established inclusion in a group may be the individual skill levels of the fishermen. For instance, it may be desirable to be in a radio group with very skilled fishermen (someone who is not necessarily a friend) and in another case a parent may team in a radio group with a young inexperienced family member in order to support him or her.

Although new to Cordova, I was accepted as a long-time friend of JP and had no difficulty merging into the fast-paced May scene in the community. Although this was just one home, I noticed similar arrangements in the interactions in the harbor, which is the summer action hub in the community. Fishermen tend to tie their boats up to others they want to be close to and there were often occasions when the harbor was so crowded that the boats were tied so that you may have to crawl over three or four rails to get to the boat you were aiming for. These notes are included to demonstrate that despite a competitive fishery, large groups of people do work with each other as radio partners and respond to the social scene in Cordova when not fishing.

A group distinctly separate from the rest of the fleet is the Russian Old Believers, a cultural/religious group with communities near Homer, Delta Junction and Wasilla Alaska as well as out of state in locations such as Woodburn, Molalla and Canby, Oregon. This group is important to acknowledge because of general local attitudes about them. Some of the key features to consider include:

1. Their boats have a distinct design and they often fish as a group;
2. Some Cordovan residents criticize this particular group for not taking better care of their fish harvest. For example, they may be more likely to fish for a larger-scale processor rather than self-processing a higher end product as discussed earlier;
3. There is a Cordova opinion that the group is socially inaccessible and does not interact with the local community;
4. Permit brokers from both Homer and Cordova suggest that the Old Believer families or individuals are the stakeholders most likely to purchase permits, as they become available on the market.

#### 4.12 Russian Old Believers in Alaska and Their Participation in Commercial Fishing

The Russian Old Believer interest in the fishery seems to be more a sense of basic seasonal income rather than the specialized, prized occupation discussed by local user groups. Included in this dissertation is a portrait that reflects this also, but the tone of enmity toward the group is subdued. The title is “If the Boats Could Speak,” and is composed from the perspective of boats in antagonistic conversation with each other.

I interviewed several Russian Old Believer fishermen in Homer at the Kachemak Gear Shed, Homer’s primary shop for industry apparatus. When interviewed, these fishermen were likely to downplay their involvement in the industry compared to the more elaborate way that Cordova residents often expressed their participation. There was not as much discussion about multi-generational family heritage relative to commercial fishing even though today it is possibly more family oriented with the Russian Old Believer contingent of the fleet. Much of the behavior and tactics related to participation in commercial fishing, in general, occurs in a family context. For example, often there are methods to passing on fishing permits, vessels and general gear to people within the same family. Also, many of these families can be observed in full-year participation as a family harvesting additional species such as halibut and cod. Despite these features of their strong integration within the industry, the occupation of fishing with this particular group is not expressed with the same kind of loyalty to the Copper River product heard from Cordova residents. Third and fourth generation Cordova residents often refer to their community heritage or long-term family residency as a way to demonstrate their deserved access to the fishery. Whereas in conversations with the Russian Old Believer group, the predominant attitude seems more focused on the general and routine economic opportunities of commercial fishing rather than a social-cultural connection to participating in this particular fishery.



In several discussions, the Russian Old Believer interviewees explained to me how a permit is often transferred from one family member to another and illustrated scenarios. Age, for instance, and where a family member stands in relation to his siblings is one component of significance. When a male reaches a certain age—his family will often assist with providing a permit in this person's name. There are a few ways this can be accomplished. Gifting permits, legally transferring them from one individual to another with no charge from the State, is one way. For example, if there was an older brother who held the permit while it was his turn, his family may expect or require that the permit be relisted in a younger brother's name so he can take his turn with support of the family. This would require the older brother to purchase a permit if he wanted to continue to fish. Alternatively, if the permit was a permanent gift (such as a gift of marriage—also typical in this community), the family may summon the funds to purchase a new permit.

#### 4.13 Contemporary Canneries and Fish Processing

Despite significant technology and mechanical transitions from the early canneries, human employees are still critical for product handling. There are a variety of typical jobs on the floor: plant manager, general managers, foremen, quality control, loaders, general fish handlers and clean-up crew. There is also administrative work and marketing. In terms of salmon, most positions are seasonal and contribute to the Cordova summer boom in activity but some positions are year-round. Several canneries currently operate in Cordova. The most prominent are Trident Seafoods, Ocean Beauty and the locally developed Copper River Seafoods. The presence of these facilities creates another stable component of salmon fisheries in the community of Cordova—it is a prominent source of revenue and contributes to community identity. This

feature, the presence of seafood processing in the community, is one of the key indicators of fishery dependence in NOAA's Alaska Community Profile project (Hines-Cornell et al., 2013). There are seasonal labor surges when workers arrive from outside but there is also a stable base for local employment and people have pride in their product. This is especially true for Copper River Seafoods. The Copper River Seafoods is unique because the business opened with the motivated efforts of Cordova residents and the salmon products marketed are more specialized: smoked, marinated or gift box designs, for example. It is a successful business with plants now located outside of Cordova, as well.

The cannery presence is a significant feature in the overall salmon marketing characteristic that Cordova has created. For example, Ocean Beauty sponsors the annual delivery of the first king salmon flight of the year from Cordova to Seattle. This is a well-known and anticipated event that places huge public awareness, beyond the state of Alaska, on this particular fish and the fishery. A marketing scheme like this is not replicated in any other salmon fisheries in the state.

#### 4.14 Contemporary Salmon Harvest Gear

Each salmon fishery in the Sound requires the participant to hold a gear-specific permit from the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) and the permits are specifically coded to each fishery. There are three major gear categories for commercial salmon fisheries in Prince William Sound: the set-net fleet (very minimal), the drift-fleet and the seine fleet. The set-net fleet refers to permit holders who set their gillnets directly from the beach. The drift-fleet sets a gillnet from their vessel and hand picks fish trapped in the net. The

purse seine fleet sets a dense net around a school of fish and brings the net into a bag that can be hauled on deck or siphoned directly into a tender.

All fishery regions in the state have a specific identification code. Prince William Sound is identified by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as “Area E.” The permit number for the drift-fleet is S03E, seine fleet is S01E and for the set-net fleet is S04E. The CFEC has a public permit database that allows public access to research permit holders by various features: year of permit, specific fishery, zip code of permit holder or first and last name.

Salmon fisheries for Prince William Sound occur in eleven major districts: the Bering River, the Copper River, the Eastern, Northern, Coghill, Northwestern, Eshamy, Southwestern, Montague, Southeastern and Unakwik (See Figure 4). The seine fleet harvest is based almost entirely on hatchery produced pink salmon.

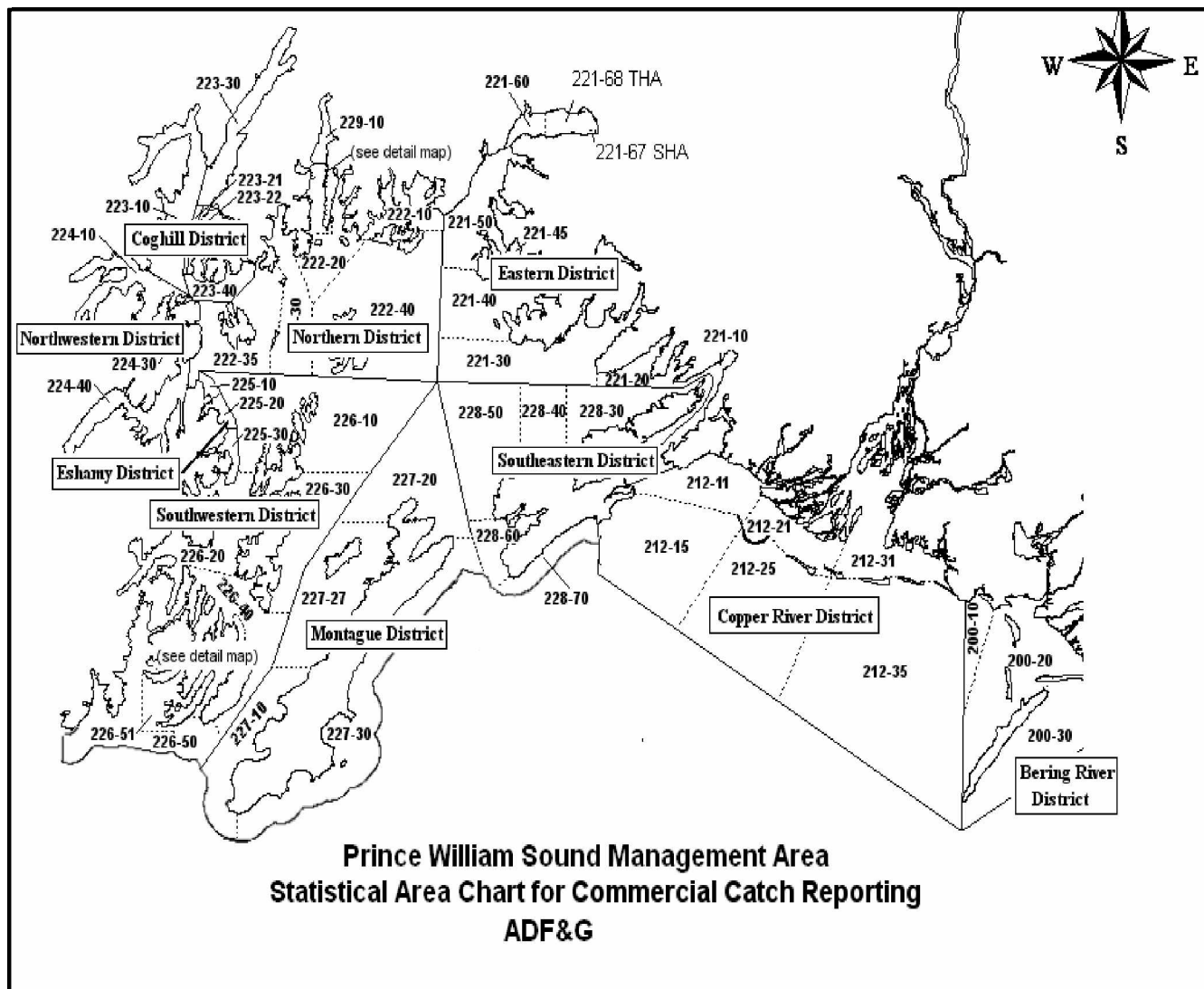


Figure 4: Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commercial Districts

#### 4.15 Salmon Hatcheries

“The modern Alaska hatchery program was initiated in the early 1970’s in response to a relatively depressed commercial salmon industry” (Clark et al., 2006, 8). In 1971 the state legislature created a salmon “enhancement” program to propagate fish and improve opportunities for harvest. Originally, it was operational through ADF&G, titled the “Fisheries Rehabilitation, Enhancement and Development Division” or FRED program. The first hatcheries in the state were developed at Snettisham near Juneau, Main Bay in Prince William Sound, Ship Creek near

Anchorage and at Kotzebue Sound (ADFG, 2009, 24). Soon after, the Alaska state legislature passed the Hatchery Act in 1974. This, along with the Fisheries Enhancement Loan Program, established a low-interest loan opportunity and this is how the Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation (PWSAC), a private not-for-profit corporation, was established with efforts instigated by Cordova residents. “The purpose of the aquaculture program in Prince William Sound...was to stabilize natural variability in the pink salmon runs and to provide for a sustainable and economically viable industry” (Hilborn and Eggers, 2000, 340).

Another reason for Cordova’s community interest in the hatchery program is that residents of Cordova were also concerned with the environmental hazards related to the 1971 construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline with a terminal in Valdez. Their concerns were fully realized with the 1989 EVOS event. The development of PWSAC created a new fishery. The seine fleet in the region relies almost entirely on the hatchery produced pink salmon. There would not be enough fish to support the seine fishery without enhancement.

In the hatchery process, the salmon are separated by gender; eggs and sperm (milt) are collected by hatchery crew and combined in the laboratory to fertilize the eggs. The fertilized eggs are stored in incubation tanks that simulate river upwelling. This provides oxygen to the eggs and removes wastes. The tanks have plastic pellets to cover the bottom of the tank—this mimics gravel in river beds. The eggs hatch in late fall, usually in November, and the fry can use the plastic pellets as artificial habitat, like they would with stones in a river.

Once fry are large enough to successfully transition from freshwater to saltwater (smolt), plant managers move them to temporary net pens in ocean water where they continue to be fed. In the seawater pens they imprint the local conditions and this is how they know where to return home at the end of their life cycle. The hatchery releases the young salmon from the pens

into the wild depending on various factors of consideration such as: what species the salmon is (pink salmon can be released earlier into the water than chum, sockeye or Chinook/ king salmon), local food availability in the water (plankton), and when the fish have reached appropriate target size.

The amount of time the fish spend in the wild depends on the species. In Prince William Sound most fish released are pink salmon that spend approximately 18 months at sea. The adult fish return back to the relative location of the hatchery, due to the biological location implant, and this is where the commercial fisheries occur. Some fish have to be caught and returned to the plant for broodstock—the fish that will supply the next round of eggs and sperm.

Currently (spring 2019), the Alaska Board of Fish is beginning to look at scientific literature on genetic and ecological interactions between wild and hatchery stock salmon. That review has already created tensions and differences in interest among the various user groups such as salmon fishermen from regions with enhancement hatcheries and regions lacking the hatcheries, for example.

#### 4.16 Management and Regulation of Openings

Before the seasonal fishery can open it has to be examined and regulatory guidelines set by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In the Copper River drift-net region, the location runs along the Barrier Islands at the mouth of the Copper River. The role of ADF&G is to manage sustainable harvest guidelines. Their job is not to monitor the regulatory fishing behavior of fishermen; that responsibility falls to the Alaska State Troopers. Regulations are established by the Alaska Board of Fish. By fishing behavior, I refer to gear guidelines (components such as net mesh size, net length, boat length, proper waste management features, proper permits for

both the vessel and crew) as well as adherence to open and closed areas. That dimension of monitoring is the responsibility of the Alaska State Troopers. In some cases, the Troopers will monitor by boat and sometimes by air, depending on funding, staff, available gear and the particular features of an opening. Some openings may hold more tension than others (such as the first opening of the year, an opening with a smaller regulatory area or a shorter time frame). I was able to watch the first opening of 2014 with the local Trooper by flight (see portrait “Flying the Opening”).

In order to monitor and to have a timely awareness of the volume of salmon harvest, ADFG uses the fish ticket system, “...sales receipts issued to commercial fishermen as they provide a permit card when they deliver their catch” (Clark et al., 2006, 15). Included on the sales receipt (see the attached document example at the end of this chapter) is a small check box that includes “not sold/ personal use.” It is not a very prominent feature of the fish ticket and it is not clear who is responsible for filling out that part of the form. The form confirms the fisherman’s CFEC permit code, poundage of various gear types, brief description of statistical area (where the fish were harvested), total poundage caught, price paid by the buyer and the permit holder’s signature.

One feature of the fish tickets that is important to acknowledge is that in practice they are often filled out very quickly, especially in the drift fishery because on a day with high volume of fish in delivery by the fleet as a whole, there may be as many as four boats lined up on each side of the tender (eight boats total). This leads to very brief communication and a quick turnaround with minimal interaction between the tender and the fishing vessel. The fishing boat may only pass off two bags of fish. They are supposed to deliver different species of fish separately and are supposed to report what is not sold but this is not necessarily enforced because the process

does not occur in a supervised manner. Sometimes the behavior and tactics between the boat and the tender do not accomplish this delivery process consistently. There are many variables that might influence it because of how much physical action occurs at the time of delivery.

Considerations include: the conditions of the weather and water, action of the fishermen and deckhands on both the tender and fishing boat, the motion of the mechanical gear needed to off-load, and the fish because they are potentially still alive when delivered.

#### 4.17 Occupational Costs and Revenue of Commercial Salmon Fishing

From the perspective of a commercial fisherman, expenditures for a commercial fishing operation include costs both in-season and the rest of the year. The in-season costs include: boat fuel, grocery, permit fees due to Alaska's CFEC and some availability of emergency or potentially unexpected repair costs (e.g., mechanical supplies, engine repair needs, net and line needs). Hull and personal injury insurance are also a major annual expense. Immediately post-season, crew shares are due. These are usually determined pre-season when the crew person signs a contract that will state what percent of the fish income he or she will receive. Typically, this is 8-10% of the total boat adjusted gross earnings: revenue recorded on the fish ticket less shared costs such as groceries and fuel that are removed first from the boat gross earnings.

Down season costs include replacement and repair of basic gear, vessel maintenance and anything new or invested in the boat that the fishermen finds a necessary improvement. Down season costs could be something as substantial as replacement engines, vessel construction or restructuring or as simple as basic net repairs or interior updates.

Cordova has limited facilities for major maintenance on vessels. In Prince William Sound, fishermen would likely find more extensive assistance in Valdez. This is partially because there



are more mechanics mostly aligned with the oil terminal that also do boat work. Cordova also does not have a very large boat yard. In some cases, it is typical for a boat that needs major restoration to travel to Homer or Seattle.

Fishermen are paid based on the poundage of fish and species they deliver and, increasingly, based on the condition of the fish they deliver. In many salmon fisheries, fishermen agree to a base price with post-season adjustments that depend on the wholesale price that processors receive for their product. In Cordova, there is more self-processing from the drift fishery than elsewhere in the state due, again, to the proximity from the fishing flats to the processing station. In many cases, the fisherman will have other family or employees in town helping to run the processing portion of the fishery. This is another component of the fishery that creates a sense of significant personal value and ownership linking the fishermen to the deliverable product. A self-processor can take as much care as he or she wants in all components of harvest to market.

#### 4.18 Eastern Prince William Sound and the Copper River Flats

The Copper River drift-net fishery occurs in the waters closest to the Barrier Islands, a string of islands that represent a clear visual line of coordinates of inside and outside waters as depicted in Figure 2 (for a visual description, see “Portrait of the Copper River Flats” and “Prince William Sound Poetry Set”). To get to the fishing flats, boats travel from Cordova, out of Orca Inlet through a shallow channel that wends through shifting shoals. The United States Coast Guard (USCG) sets channel markers to aid navigation during the fishing season, May to October. Once past Mummy Island (the entrance to Orca Inlet), the Copper River flats begin. The Barrier Islands are the five very flat islands that scarcely rise above sea level—the

physical boundaries distort and merge depending on tide and weather so the groups have plural names: Egg Islands, Copper Sands, Grass Island Sands, Kolenhenik Bar and Strawberry Reef (these island names or nicknames for them appear in several of the portraits).

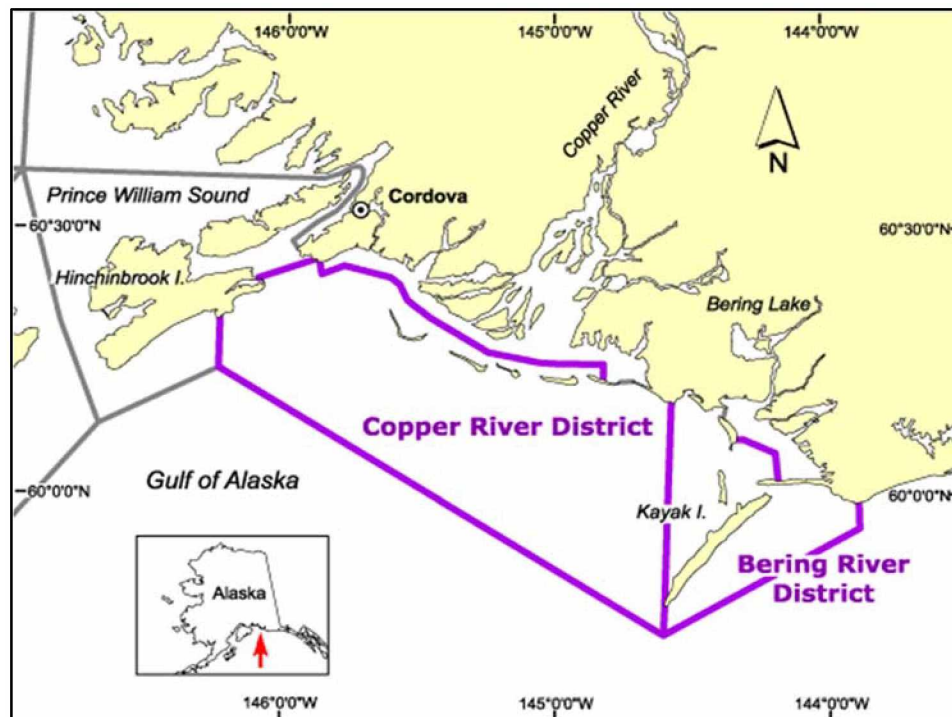


Figure 5: ADFG Copper River District, the Barrier Islands are circled

Despite a relatively small size, the islands create weather and storm protection and calmer swells to leeward—a place of relative safety for anchorage pre or post-fishing hours. However, there is also a challenge to fishing in very shallow water in the immediate proximity to the bar. There are inconsistent wave breaks depending on tide and weather conditions that are dangerous to fishing vessels (see portrait “Raise the Bar” for more specific details of the hazards here). Even very skilled fishermen who have been fishing in the region for decades experience major hazards here. For example, Bill Webber, a third generation Cordova resident started fishing at the age of six, still actively participates in the fishery and is now a skilled marine

architect. He lost his previous boat while passing through one of the bar entrances on the Copper River Delta in the Gulf of Alaska, a testament to how dangerous commercial fishing is, even for those like Webber with decades of marine experience (Gerendasy, 2017, 1). The weather shield created by the islands is beneficial to salmon. It allows for protective lingering grounds to delay upstream migration if water conditions are not suitable. Therefore, the islands play a role in how the fishery is managed.

For instance, in 1996, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (the Board) determined a need to put a greater effort towards the biological escapement (un-caught fish) of both sockeye and Chinook salmon from the marine fishery through to the up-river spawning grounds of the Copper River tributaries. The Board created three related management plans: 1) 5 AAC 24.360 The Copper River District Management Plan, 2) 5 AAC 77.590 A Copper River District Personal Use Salmon Management Plan and 3) 5 AAC 34.361 Copper River Chinook Salmon Management Plan. Harvest potential to the commercial fleet was reduced by 5% to reach a more conservative management approach.

#### 4.19 Drift Gear

The Copper River commercial district is primarily accessed by drift-boat and the target species are red (aka sockeye) salmon. Chinook/king salmon is caught and sold in this fishery as well. Both species are also available for subsistence and commercially caught fish can be sold or retained for personal consumption. If retained for personal consumption, the fisherman is responsible for reporting that information on the fish ticket. Recent years have shown poor run returns and as a result, there are sometime limitations or closures to when and where the drift-

fleet is able to fish. Commercial closures are regulated by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Vessels that operate in the Copper River fishery have variable numbers of deckhands. Many boats operate with only one person but it is not uncommon to have two or three crew members depending on needs of the skipper. In contemporary design, most boats have the house aft (in the stern section of the boat) but older vessels were modeled with the house forward. Boats often have a flat hull to accommodate the very shallow water in the Copper River flats and high powered engines that allows the vessel to travel from Cordova to the flats in a short amount of time, perhaps two to three hours.

A typical fishery opens at seven in the morning. Prior to setting the net, the skipper will provide radio checks with his radio group to confirm that the radio is working appropriately and everyone can hear. A drift net consists of a mesh curtain suspended between a floating (cork) line and a weighted (lead) line that hangs in the water column. On a bow-picker, the vessel typical in Prince William Sound, the net is wound onto a drum on the bow of the boat. At the end of the net is a buoy so that the fisherman can see the entire length of the gear. When he is ready to make a set, the fisherman throws the buoy off the boat and backs away to set the net in a line perpendicular to the expected path of his quarry. The lead line sinks, the cork line floats, and the web creates a nearly transparent mesh wall that salmon swim into. Fish are able to swim partway through the net before they are entangled by various body parts, heads, gills or tails. They can also just twist the net into somewhat of an entrapment around the entire body.

Once the net is set, radio group members discuss fish “hits,” which are evident by corks that normally move in time with wind and waves and instead show a sort of disruption in pattern. For example, a cork may briefly disappear beneath the surface water which indicates

that a fish has “hit” the net below. This discussion is an effort to estimate what the total retrieval will be and determine how long to let the net soak. The net stays in the water for varied times—depending on the status of what the fishermen observes during the set. Once it is time to bring the net back on board, the boat is put in idle and the drum wraps the net back onto the deck of the boat. The drum device is controlled by gears that a fisherman can stop and start depending on how the fish are coming over the bow. Fishermen typically shake fish out of the net or, if there is a gill or tooth that is tangled, they have to untangle the web. This process is referred to as “picking fish.” The area directly below the net is where brailer bags are held. Brailer bags are dense nylon mesh bags that are lashed into the fish holding tanks. A standard brailer bag is 30” x 30” by 40” (approximately a square cube) and holds approximately 1,000 pounds of fish. Most drift boats have four to eight brailer bags. Some may have as few as two. The quantity depends on the boat design. Some boats have a flush deck where the lid to the holding tank creates a flat surface to stand on. Others have hatches that are several inches off the deck.

Due to the current status of the vessels (size and speed), most Cordova fishermen return to port at the end of the fishing period. This is a very unique characteristic of this fishery compared to other offshore salmon fisheries in the State. In Bristol Bay (western Alaska), most permit holders are not local and are on-site only during the fishing season. In Cook Inlet, there are many drift permits apportioned to Kenai Peninsula residents but it is not as likely for the boats to return to homeport after each opening. This observation provides a critical component of the fleet dynamics. Although the fishery labor on the Copper River flats is probably no more or less physically vigorous than salmon fisheries in other parts of the state waters, the regular return to home port for Cordova residents is a significant difference. It means that fresh salmon is more

frequently transferred from vessel to other community residents, it is easier to access and it is easier to process as desired (smoked, frozen, canned, pickled).

The proximity from grounds to home also provides an opportunity for fishermen to process and self-market their fish. This trait is not typical in other salmon fisheries in the state and creates a more obvious investment by the community in the fishery from grounds to marketing. The proximity to home also has an impact on social features of the fleet and family; there is more seasonal interaction and much shorter periods of time away, even if the fishery is very busy. There is more interaction across the whole spectrum of the community.

#### 4.20 Post-Delivery: Cordova's Central Harbor

The Cordova boat harbor is the physical center of the community. It is protected by two breakwaters. It has 852 berths and transient moorage is available (United States Coast Pilot, 2014, 140). The harbor is relatively shallow—at the entrance it is 12 feet deep at low tide and the berthing area is seven feet deep. Though the port is large in terms of the number of boats it can berth, the shallow depth makes it unsuitable for larger fishing vessels and I have heard interviewees describe this as a reason Cordova residents do not participate in fisheries that might require significantly larger boats (e.g., pot fisheries for crab and black cod, longline fisheries for Pacific cod, trawl fisheries for groundfish).

#### 4.21 Seine Gear

In Alaska State fisheries, purse seiners primarily target salmon and herring. The vessels operate by setting a net off the back deck of a vessel and “pursing” the lower line (called the lead line because of its heavy weight) into a round, bowl shape to circle a school of fish. Depending

on the fish, the net is either pursed immediately or is allowed to soak in order to pick-up the largest number of fish for each set. In the herring fisheries, the net is not always even fully extended before retrieval while in the salmon fisheries a net may soak in the set position for up to 30 minutes. The size of a seine vessel is variable but Alaska law limits seine vessels to 58 feet or less. Consequently, a 58-foot vessel is often referred to as a “limit seiner.”<sup>7</sup>

The Prince William Sound seine fishery (S01E) is largely based on the private non-profit (PNP) hatchery-enhanced pink salmon. This is a somewhat unique fishery in the state of Alaska because of the significant stock enhancement from Prince William Sound hatcheries as mentioned earlier in this chapter. There are hatchery-enhanced salmon seine fisheries in both Kodiak and southeast Alaska as well; hatcheries in Kodiak, like those in PWS focus on pinks, while southeast Alaska hatcheries focus on chum.

Seine and drift openings rarely occur in the same area. Seiners work primarily near the hatcheries and drifters work both specifically on the Copper River Flats and then a few migrate to pink salmon locations, likely by hatcheries. According to vocalized observations from fishermen in both gear categories, the drift boats that are more likely to move into other regions of the sound are mostly the non-local, Russian Old Believer fleet.

A typical seine boat, operates with a skipper and three crew members. One crew member runs the skiff and the others work on deck: one to stack the lead line and one to stack the cork line. When the skipper is ready to set the net, one of the crew members releases the bowline from the skiff. Both the seiner and the skiff drive away from each other in a relatively straight

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<sup>7</sup> See Portrait “Miss Emily—Delivery Days” for information on how a limit seiner operates as a tender.

line. Like the drift description above, there is a cork line and a lead line that are attached together with web—which has smaller squares than on the drift boat because the intention is not for the fish to get trapped in the web, but rather to create a temporary pen. After the net is open for approximately 30 minutes, the boats start to wrap towards each other. Depending on physical setting and weather, one of the boats may do more moving.

Once the boats are connected, the skiffman hands the purse-line, the line that has held the net down, to the crew on deck. The purse line comes over the rail of the seine boat and is wound on board with the deck winch. This can be a very hazardous feature of seining because even with a metallic hood/coverage if a piece of material (like a rain jacket or glove) is wound into the gear or if the line somehow slips off the deck winch, it would require immediate attention from the skipper or possibly one of the crew members. In some cases the skipper lets the line wind itself and uses a plunge pole to scare the fish away from the opening of the net and into the areas of the net that would be harder to get out of. While the purse line is coming on-board, the net comes over a power block about 15 feet over the heads of the crew. One crew member stacks the cork line and one stacks the lead line and the net coming over falls in a central pile that the deckhands try to keep relatively organized. When all of the purse line has been pulled up, the bottom of the net has been fully connected and the fish will no longer have a route to escape. At this point, a deckhand takes the C-hook, a heavy metallic hook and strings the pulled up rings onto the hook. It is set up so that purse rings can come up in time with the lead line as the rest of the net is stacked onto the boat.

When the gear reaches the bag of fish at the end of the net, a deckhand assists the skipper so that the bag can be handled onto the boat in a manner that allows the fish to go straight from the bag into the fish hold. It is typical for this to get caught up in some way with other equipment on



deck, so that the fish may end up spilling. But, the rail of the boat is usually at least 6 inches high and though the fish may be flopping with lack of water, few are lost overboard. If a set is large or heavy enough that the bag cannot be lifted onto the deck of the boat, it is possible for the tender to pump fish directly out of the water.

#### 4.22 Publicizing Fish: the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute

The Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) was established by Alaska State Legislature in 1981 as a public corporation (AS 16.51.010). ASMI is not focused on any particular fishery but rather the overall quality and generic marketing of the seafood industry in Alaska—particularly in comparison with other federal and international regions. The overall mission of the organization is to increase the economic value of the Alaska seafood resource; to accomplish this ASMI is guided by six key principles:

Increasing awareness of the Alaska Seafood Brand, collaborate marketing programs that align ASMI and industry marketing efforts for maximum impact within the food industry, long-term proactive marketing planning, quality assurance, technical industry analysis, education, advocacy and research and finally, prudent fiscal management (<https://www.alaskaseafood.org/>).

#### 4.23 Copper River Salmon: Distinct Product Recognition

The Copper River sockeye fishery has extremely dependable market recognition; consumers are aware of the fishery and will likely lean towards purchasing this before any other salmon. This is partially a result of an Alaska State Legislative Bill passed to support the formation of Regional Seafood Development Associations (RSDA's) in Alaska. The Copper River/ Prince William Sound marketing association ([www.copperrivermarketing.org/](http://www.copperrivermarketing.org/)) was the first in the state, formed in 2005. The main office is located in Cordova. The organization has

formed promotional relationships with endowed food service providers in and out of the state to endorse the quality and professional opportunities available with Copper River salmon. Residents describe it as a community-based fishery—the livelihood of Cordova. From the fisherman to the processor, salmon has significant support and pride from the entire community. There is also some very substantial leadership within the community that has created a structure to fully support the industry in Cordova.

#### 4.24 Conclusion

This chapter has covered a large range of topics but all contribute to fleshing out contributing factors to Cordova's current sense of community identity. It is important to follow features of the past and consider major transitions that have influenced the contemporary personality of Cordova. What is present now is the fishing industry. Cordova residents are attached to and appreciative of this particular fishery and region more than they express interest in the larger and more general nature of state and federal commercial fishing across the entire state of Alaska. The sense of local connection is what makes it more unique than some of the other fishing communities in coastal Alaska. Though there is some indication that the residents of Cordova hold fewer permits than they did in years past, it seems that this industry will stay a key feature of Cordova's identity because of the way the community has built around the structure of fishing particularly with efforts focused on processing, marketing and group organization. Even the role of the salmon as a local food is more obvious in Cordova than elsewhere—it is a common gift within and outside the community. That key link as a true community food source contributes to a sense of community culture around salmon.

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## Chapter 5: Creating a Web of Community Portraits

There are two metaphorical components to this chapter: “a web” and “portraits.” A “portrait” is a composed representation of what I experienced through the process of this dissertation. Some are based on very specific interview scenarios either with a single interviewee or with more than one person. Other portraits are collected descriptions and interpretations of either the experience of observing the physical environment of Cordova and the Copper River Flats or considering other historical features of the community. The narratives are “portraits” because they are not solely a monologue or transcript from each narrator; they are influenced by my role in the conversations and interviews. The way they are composed is a form of expression and consideration of the entire setting which the dialogue and observations took place more than a simple report.

The stories told were influenced by the manner in which I asked the questions and in some cases, in an interactive environment with several fishermen present, rather than by solitary interviewee (for example, see “Coffee Talk” or “Raise the Bar”). Also, the portraits are not all entirely based on a single interview. This was the general tactic, but there were some variations. For example, some are constructed with collected commentary from a group of individuals interviewed at the same time. In these varied ways the pieces are composed, snapshots of aspects of life in this community. That is why I use the term, “portraits”. In terms of “a web,” the collection of pieces belongs together to represent the nature of this community. With some of the portraits removed or viewed by themselves the overarching story would not be the same. This would also be true if more were added. Concurrently, a web or a net in commercial fishing constantly needs updating—something will always change, need a new component, need repair



or improvement due to weathering and continual use of the net. I find this metaphor relevant to oral history, too. The structure of a story that is re-told seeks to maintain a historical tradition as a way to share experiences and communicate with each other but the features and components emphasized in what, precisely, we tell and prioritize will inevitably change to reflect the current setting and the reasons it is recalled and re-told. Any community, regardless of where it is, has a history and we can see and find pictures of the past, but the current status and the future status will not be perfectly retained as narrators face and interpret transitions relative to their own priorities.

### 5.1 Interview Design

The community portraits for Cordova were initially designed with a basis of recorded interviews and site-observation at the time of an open interview. In later cases, once the general technique of interviewing became more familiar to me, concentrated participant observation with careful notes (but no recording) seemed to facilitate better, more elaborate responses to the same questions. Inquiries were never survey or poll based. Initially, I relied too much on recordings and assumed by collecting enough of them, I would be able to create a solid understanding of the community. While the recordings and transcriptions did help me to learn about some components of the town, a simple interview did not provide the same kind of social awareness I gained with some of the more conversational, interactive scenarios.

These allowed for some sense of spontaneity and an opportunity for “naturally occurring discourse,” described by Farnell and Graham as “utterances that occur in the context of social interaction, in contrast to utterances specifically elicited by a linguist or ethnographer” (1998, 411). The acceptance of “naturally occurring discourse” disrupted standardization of interviews

but I did not find homogenized questions necessary to gain an understanding of Cordova community identity.

When possible, I encouraged active storytelling and group discussions where I could ask several people questions concurrently. This facilitated the opportunity to witness interactions, reflect on what people shared in common, and consider the collective topics that emerged and question why. This also allowed more dynamic performances and it is important to describe these features in the portraits because in almost all interview settings, with the exception of interviewees familiar enough with the interview process to create an intentional formality to discussion, the context of the dialogue was as often important as the actual words. This is because context created a sense of implied or allegorical meaning explaining why the interviewee would tell me the specific story he or she had in mind at the time of the interview.

For example, the piece titled, “Coffee Talk,” is based on interviews with second and third generation young men (under the age of 30 at the time) and though it combines commentary from several different discussions, it is primarily based on a particular conversation I had with two skippers. At the beginning of the transcript I made a note that explains that by having the two friends together, I can barely introduce my own intention of the project and get them to sign a release of information before they start chatting casually. Having a complete transcript facilitated follow up research post. For example, at the time, I did not know what “NOAA’s Capital Construction Fund” meant and why they were interested in it. The two men communicated energetically with approximately two minutes of rapid conversation until one of them asked me: “So, what kind of questions were you going to ask?” I did get a chance to ask them several of my prepared questions, but in many cases the two young men continued dialogue

based on their own interests that happened to spontaneously fill in what I was looking for with my own questions.

This is the concept of the discussion or “dialogue” rather than a very distinct and formalized interview setting and is where awareness of how a conversation progresses is important. Charles Briggs’ 1986 book *Learning How to Ask* addresses many variables that lead to a context of discussion mentioning: “the sum total of physical, social and psychological stimuli that exist at the time of an interaction” (25). He explains, though, that it is not feasible to simply define this “sum total.” The features that influence communication are constantly transitioning. Furthermore, to reflect on these theories post-interview blurs the context even more. It is a dynamic practice: “What is said is a result of something jointly produced by interviewer and respondent” (3); it is not simply oral material that would be said or portrayed the same way under other circumstances.

One of the reviewers (PS), addressed this when we met to go over her observations of the portraits. We were specifically discussing the behavioral variations between the Russian Old Believer fleet, the local residents, and the seasonal residents. As PS mentioned, “what I am willing to say to you here right now is probably very different than what I might say sitting in the Alaskan (a Cordova bar) having a beer.” The setting was more formal, at an early time in the day and established solely for the purpose of discussing this individual’s observations of the fleet for the sake of academic contributions to this dissertation. There was no casual or social dimension to our conversation.

As I review this process and interview tactic, I can see how my established interviews were distinctly not “surveys.” Very rarely was interaction with the interviewees solely an effort to collect data in an impersonal manner. Originally, when the project began a decade ago, that was

closer to my intention--due to be influenced by training in Marine Policy, I sought to maintain some academic space between myself and the individuals I spoke with and to structure my interviews in an “objective” and consistent way, regardless of the interviewee. That is not what ultimately transpired. Also, features of my personal cultural awareness of Alaska commercial fisheries influenced the interactive capacity of the interviews more than I realized at the time they were conducted. In academic settings (classes, conferences, lectures), I did not normally reference my family history in Alaska with a close connection to a commercial salmon fishing fleet. But I came to realize in recording the interviews, my emic or “inside” awareness of the industry provided a substantial benefit to the quality of the interviews, not necessarily as a component of trust, but rather through semantic dynamics. As Briggs explains, “the social roles assumed by interviewers and respondents prove to be of special importance to the success of the interview” (41).

Some of the themes addressed within the portraits include:

1. How did the individual’s experience contribute to the group structure of the community?
2. What cultural behaviors of the community were common or frequently referred to?
3. When were there agreements and disagreements about what it is like to live in Cordova? And what were they?
4. Are there significant “insider” and “outsider” statuses frequently referred to?
5. How were group dynamics apparent in individual narrative responses?

I cannot question the credibility or accuracy of what my informants expressed to me as their own truths—it is the beliefs and experiences they live with and in most cases the particular wording choices made at the time of the interview are unlikely to be repeated in exactly the same

way again. At one level I must consider if what they tell me is “true” to my field work and to what other interviewees have explained and report discrepancies if there are multiple opinions emerging on certain topics. Discrepancies certainly exist and it is important to consider why. On another level I am asking the community to tell what they experience, feel, and believe. Language decisions, even in an interview, are not made in a completely controlled environment. A narrative, once authored, needs an explanation for the context in which it was presented as well as the position of the person who contextualizes the writing from oral to record to text.

## 5.2 Portrait Format

Several specific books informed the format for the portraits. One was Saga’s *Memories of Silk and Straw: A Self-Portrait of Small-Town Japan* (1990). This book is structured with 58 short pieces of writing, each of what might be termed a case study—a brief glance into one person’s perception of the world around him or herself in the context of a very specific setting or title such as “The General Store,” “The Midwife,” “The Tiler,” “The Fisherman’s Wife.” Some of the pieces are very brief—only a few paragraphs long, others include an entire spectrum of conversational interview containing both questions and responses. Observation of the varied lengths was important to my work because it demonstrates the role of spontaneity in conversation and the varied dialogue that occurred between myself and interviewees depending on the setting of the interview.

Blythe’s *Akenfield*, composed in 1969, is a series of stories that appear as monologues—there is no evident interviewer. Blythe describes the book as the quest for the voice of Akenfield, Suffolk. The stories differ in length but are organized in chapters with set topical areas such as:

“The Forge,” “The School,” “Officers and Gentlemen.” Akenfield, is an old English village that was once enclosed by a hedge. The literature describes Akenfield as a close knit, “indigenous,” group. There are eighteen families descended from people living in the village c.

1750. Following the introduction, there is a brief overview of census-type information and a list of characters. There is no conclusion. The stories must speak for themselves.

*Amoskeag*, written in 1978 by Hareven and Langbach is not organized as much around the characters in in the community but a chain of events. The social structure that draws the characters together is a large manufacturing plant in Manchester, New Hampshire. In this book, each chapter is labeled by a person’s name and is generally written in the first person. Although there are some chapters that have more than one character, in which case the voice is labeled by character name, like a script. In the cases where there is more than one speaker, it is evident that the speakers encourage each other’s recollections and can often add a bit more information to what the previous speaker stated. The pieces also do not have distinct starting and stopping points; there are many cases where arbitrary memories are recalled and shared amongst the interviewees. The book is reminiscent of either a cannery setting or a large scale fishing vessel with many crewmembers, all with their own stories to tell.

### 5.3 Cordova Character Portraits

In a community the size of Cordova it is inevitable that most of the year-round residents and many seasonal residents know each other—sometimes certain acknowledgements occur repetitively to reinforce the idea of “web” in the community. One portrait reviewer who is not a Cordova resident, shared a few comments addressing the intimacy of the town and how it feels to be an outsider:

Being from out of town and especially being from, gulp, Homer, we experienced some localism. Largely, we were just ignored and unacknowledged. I remember making a set inside the bar and having a boat scream over to us and tell us to pick up and get out; that was his grandpa's set. Eventually we earned a chin shift or a wave from a local and still today those little things can feel like a big deal.

Cordova is a special place that takes care of its own.<sup>8</sup>

The portraits are organized into specific groups and sequenced intentionally. It is more than just a collage of individuals who create a sense of community. The section begins with a series of pieces to demonstrate what the larger features of the community include: place/ location, local and state history, major events such as the 1964 Alaska Good Friday Earthquake and the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. The next section relates to the family dynamics of commercial fishing culture. It is important to see the role of women and their involvement in the industry culture. I begin with a very modest elderly woman whose story I enjoyed because it was so straightforward and did not display the boastful tone that I heard more frequently with younger tellers. She did not necessarily seem excited to talk or share her story with me and she set somewhat of a stoic but very informative tone, backed by decades of experience in this community. At the same time, she did relate many details of what life is like in the community and how it is directly connected to the salmon industry. These details were consistent with what younger tellers recounted. This is an important indicator that local values have passed through several generations—they are just discussed with a different characteristic or tone. This is an example of

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<sup>8</sup> By “scream” the reviewer is referring to another fisherman aggressively driving his or her boat to her know she was not fishing in an appropriate location. Though one cannot actually claim specific space in the water—as I have mentioned before there is often a sense of ownership or entitlement that goes with the local fleet.

the transmission of “local values” because there remains an indication that there is direct and meaningful interaction with the salmon industry; but the occupational dimensions have transitioned.

Other pieces in this section show a little more energy and a sense of excitement about the upcoming season. This leads to the next section: “Fish Days: Summer Life in Cordova.” It is organized to show the web of characters involved: several fishermen, a tender operator, a State Trooper. The final section presents a series of characters that demonstrate an even larger cultural division. It is based on the Russian Old Believer permit holders who make up an increasingly large portion of the fleet and who do not have the same sense of local pride in what the Copper River sockeye salmon means to the Cordova community. Each narrative was deliberately included because the pieces exemplify common features or commentary from other members in the same group.

Table 2. Portrait Sets

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Physical and Historical Features of Cordova
Family Dynamics of Community Industry
Fish Days: Summer in Cordova
The Role of the Russian Old Believers: Fishermen with a Different Vision

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#### Physical and Historical Features of Cordova

The pieces in this section demonstrate which physical and historic components of the community have contributed the most to today’s identity. To begin with, Cordova is in a unique environmental landscape. It is nestled on the coast but surrounded by mountains, marine water and in close proximity to the Copper River. Efforts have been made to create both a railroad and



a roadway to cross the river but there has not yet been any permanent success. Vehicles can reach the community conveniently by water with the Alaska State Ferry system by boarding in either Whittier or Valdez. The airport provides regular and reliable transportation through the community both north to Anchorage and south to Southeast Alaska and beyond. The various modes of public travel to the location are easily accessible; Cordova is not remote in the same sense as rural communities in other areas of Prince William Sound such as Chenega.

Though residents often comment that they enjoy being in an isolated community the opportunities to quickly export salmon are also mentioned as important. For example, the chance to rapidly transport the first Copper River sockeye of the year to Seattle is a key marketing tool. That capability would require more handling in almost every other salmon fishery in the state. Even on the Kenai fishery where deliveries are made in close proximity to the state highway, the fish would still probably spend more time in transit.

Another physical feature significant to the community identity is the lack of private land available for city or individual expansion. The largest tract of public land is the Chugach National Forest. The Eyak Corporation also owns substantial land in the area some of which was sold (78,138 acres) to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council for their Habitat Protection Program. For this reason, the physical size of the community and the ways housing is structured is fairly confined. It is easy to walk almost anywhere in the general town center. But, it is also very easy to find transport into locations that are remote and undeveloped: mountains, glaciers, the Copper River Flats themselves.

### Portrait of the Copper River Flats

This portrait set is from a two-day pre-season excursion to the flats in a subsistence trip to collect king salmon for community elders in 2011. The skipper has a limit of 30 that he can

collect. We were able to get off on some of the islands and collect seagull eggs to go with the salmon. It includes significant visual detail because it was the first time I had ever been out to the fishing grounds of the Copper and that particular day was very clear so I could see all the channels zigzagging through the water. The islands themselves were also inspiring. It is important to demonstrate the place where people fish and their unique fishery, the flats. The next day: snow and fog. Another aim of this piece is to highlight some preliminary interpretations of the first people I met in Cordova and some of the commentary that I heard that essentially lasted throughout the entirety of the project. It is followed by “the Prince William Sound Poetry Set.” The pieces are similar in the sense that they use distinct environmental imagery from the region and I think this helps give the reader a clear visualization of what it is like to be in this area.

#### Prince William Sound Poetry Set

These 11 short poems were composed as observations in Prince William Sound that include the local setting, the environment, personal memories, and salmon. The poems provide a clear portrait of what Prince William Sound and the Copper River area look like in the midst of summer. It is an overwhelming land of green and water—from every direction. For me, the best way to address this is through written observation, and the way this frequently emerges, in regard to the natural landscape, is more likely through a poetic structure rather than essay composition.

#### Visions from the Archives

I started construction of this piece tucked into a tiny desk in the depths of the Cordova museum, crowded with local artifacts everywhere around me. The curator, Denis Keogh, generously provided open access to drawers and boxes of photographs. In the piece I chose to retain the image numbers so that I could revise and improve descriptions on later trips to the

museum. My intention in writing these visual descriptions was to explain the pictures with as much detail as possible. Dates of the images range from 1902 in Katalla to 1942 in Cordova. The reason I included this was to show that despite the century of changes, there is a unique historic depth to the community. Main Street has the same basic features as it did in 1910, there are images of fishing boats and tenders at Pete Dahl Slough in 1926 just like you could see today, on the waterfront are canneries with boats pulled up to them in 1916, there are Boy Scouts eating chocolate and jumping into Lake Eyak. Mixed among images of the people are environmental scenes: Childs Glacier, Mile 5 Glacier, a vista of the flats, Mt. Eccles, people clam digging on the flats.

#### Fish Traps and Statehood

This piece was inspired by telegrams and letters housed in the “Hubbell & Waller Records, 1908-1976” within the UAF Alaska and Polar Regions archival collection. The correspondence was between corporate headquarters of Hubbell and Waller Engineering Corporation with operations along the entire coastline of Alaska and Mr. Long, an employee of the agency, hired and quickly moved to Cordova to monitor and repair salmon traps in Prince William Sound. The first place Mr. Long was sent to work was the New England Fish Company in Cordova in August of 1929. There are two dimensions to the portrait--first a representation of the telegrams and what they say and second, my version of composition that I presented at the Astoria FisherPoet gathering in 2017.

#### When the Oil Spilled

This is based on an interview with the man who was mayor of Cordova at the time of the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. He discusses the oil spill as a scar that will never go away,

claiming that healing occurred but some of the scar is still there. The tone of his commentary is interesting because he is not and was never a fisherman; his perspective on the impacts to fishermen as a group is somewhat unusual because he points out that many fishermen received a decent income for using their boats in the cleanup process, possibly more than they would in a fishing season. The way this is expressed in this particular interview is an important feature of the discussion of context presented in the introduction of this chapter. There are no shortage of publications that reference various emotional reactions to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. However, if I did not ask interviewees specific questions about the Oil Spill the topic did not come up very frequently.

#### 5.4 Family Dynamics of Community Industry

The next section of compositions depicts the roles of different family members in the home and how they are influenced by the salmon industry. It is very typical for Cordova residents to explain how many generations their family has been in the region and how many people remain there today. This particular common expression demonstrates a distinct cohesiveness to the community and a sense of proprietorship.

##### Fish Mom

This interview was conducted with an older woman, Mary, who moved to Alaska as a teenager in the 1950's with her mother. Her mother immediately went to work in the canneries, and eventually she did, too. Her husband was from her original hometown in California and he ended up fishing. She continued to work in the canneries while she raised four children, all of whom now fish in the area. Many of her grandchildren in the area also participate in the industry and they participated in the review of this portrait and several others.

The story addresses inevitable gender differences in how an individual can participate in the fishing industry. Though the Copper River flats are relatively close to the community and the boats can come home more frequently than they do in other salmon fisheries in Alaska, it is still more difficult for women to participate due to parenting obligations. Cannery work, however, does not take someone out of town so it is very typical to hear stories of women working in the canneries. At the same time, the frequency with which a Copper River fisherman can interact with a spouse is different than almost every other vessel-based salmon fishery in the state because the fishing grounds are in close proximity.

### Coffee Talk

Five young men were interviewed at two different times. The first interview was very entertaining, perhaps the liveliest one I witnessed. I do not think I had the opportunity to ask these two men any direct questions—they started talking before I could even get them to sign a release of information form and I remember having to say, “[p]lease stop until I can get this and then actually turn on my recorder!” The recording picks them up in the middle of discussion about the holding capacity of their boat. One of these men is from Kodiak and the other from Seattle. This piece is fully transcribed, but the “portrait” format is more like a sketch with less formal construction than most of the others. I chose this format because I want to demonstrate how rapidly a conversation can transpire among acquaintances who are discussing an intrinsic dimension of their lifestyle and who are unfamiliar with the process of an interview and therefore the way they articulate the material they share is very informal and lacking in professional moderation. I do not mean to be judgmental of this, I actually found that what they shared with me was more thorough than what I heard from others with much more professional or political experience in the industry (see “When the Oil Spilled,” for example).

## Raise the Bar

In the second group, there is a similar sense of excitement. They put substantial emphasis on the speed capacity of the boats and that they want their drift boat instead of a seiner “because they’d rather go 30 knots than six.” “The seiners are for the old men,” they say. They also explain to me why they would rather fish in the salmon industry instead of one that takes quota—halibut, cod, and crab.

## Old Salt

This piece is important to include because it offers such a basic and simple recollection of how a family found a way to the Copper River region of Alaska in the early 1900’s and the role that salmon played for them. It is based on discussion with a fisherman who expressed himself quickly and honestly. You can see a litany of opinionated complaints in this piece and I believe that this suitably illustrates a general tendency (at least in my observations) of fishermen to get wrapped into a conversation and complain about various components of the employment and management system they find irritating. This particular piece also seems to serve as an example of how the speaker appeared to be somewhat more willing to express his complaints as a result of my stance as an “insider” to the fishing community.

## 5.5 Fish Days: Summer Time in Cordova

### Miss Emily: Delivery Days

I coordinated a trip out to the Copper River Flats to observe the interactions between boats and the tender from the perspective of the tender. I was on-board for approximately 48

hours and though I did not audio record anything, I sat at a table in the top house with the skipper and took almost constant note of the events. He was very open to casual conversation and I probably asked him more questions and have preserved more of the exact wording of the questions than I did with unrecorded interviews with any of my “official” interviewees. Throughout the trip, I took many notes on the language used, especially by radio between the tender and the fishing boats. The boat, Miss Emily, is a seiner and in the year when this interview occurred, the vessel’s plan was to cease functioning as a tender when the Copper River fishery slowed and continued operation as a seiner in the rest of the Sound for the summer.

### Flying the Opening

I accompanied an Alaska State Trooper as he flew to witness and monitor regulatory behavior in the early morning opening on May 15, 2014. The Trooper gave me a complete safety briefing including walking around the plane, showing me which buttons were necessary to activate if, “for some reason I am to lose control of the plane and can’t push this button myself.” My intention was to familiarize myself with the Trooper’s duty in monitoring the boundaries of the opening. But, it was also valuable to see the geography of the fishery from another perspective—the Barrier Islands as a boundary site, for example. Also, here I use very specific descriptions of vessel action that mirror phrasing and terms I heard on the tender (Miss Emily) and on the fishing boats, such as, “I think we’ll just head up the line” as a reference to monitoring the closure area. When the Department of Fish and Game declare an “opening” they provide geographical coordinates to indicate where fish can be legally harvested. Reference to “the line” means that the Trooper wants to confirm the boats are in the appropriate boundary area.

## 5.6 The Role of the Russian Old Believers in Contemporary Industry Transitions

### If the Boats Could Speak: Ages of Efficiency

This portrait describes some of the differences observable in the Old Believer boats and other boats in the fleet. It is an attempt to address the cultural differences in the fleet without over-emphasis on the discrimination I have witnessed. It is written with regard to the different styles of boats but the setting is the Homer, Alaska boat yard. This is the home boat yard of the Old Believers and the boats are everywhere. There is a drift-net fishery in upper Cook Inlet, so there are plenty of examples of boats that look essentially the same as those in operation for the Copper River fishery.

Since the time I originally composed this piece (fall 2013—based on observation during summer 2013), I have noticed a change in the attitude of how people in both Homer and Cordova describe Russian Old Believers' boats. They do not have the same stigma I heard in earlier years and are less likely to be distinctly classified as “a Russian boat.”

### “Salmon is just fish”: The Family with the Most Permits

This portrays a Russian Old Believer fisherman, TR, who participates in various fisheries year-round, not solely summer salmon. He does not necessarily promote the salmon with the same tone typically heard in Cordova. He clearly holds less prioritization of the promotional marketing features that are associated with the Copper River red salmon. In his words, “a fish is just a fish.” TR provides an excellent example of how he started fishing with his family and how closely he is connected to his family's gear. This is different than the Cordova younger fishermen and how they tend to refer to gear as distinctly their own.



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## Chapter 6: Cordova Fisher Portraits

### Portrait of the Flats

As mentioned earlier, this piece presents observations I made prior to the opening of the 2011 salmon season. It is followed by “the Prince William Sound Poetry Set” because the site visit took place in the same period of time. These pieces are similar in the sense that they use referrals to distinct environmental imagery from the region and each provides visualization of what it was like to be present in this area. In some cases, there is similarity in style, but the first piece holds a more journalistic tone.

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#### **Day One: May 9, 2011**

We need King salmon to give the elders in Cordova pre-season subsistence. The fishery opens May 15<sup>th</sup> and the harbor is alive with 24 hours of sunlight, enthusiasm and energy. I am on the F/V Amulet and the skipper aims for a harvest count of 30 kings. “That’s all we get in here, they close the inside and just have us fish outside the actual flats these days,” Captain Mike explains. He expresses the significance of how much use the elders get from the fish: eating the heart, eating the liver of the King. If you don’t eat those, it wastes the fish. The elders are happy to have the whole fish, heart and soul included. Subsistence is fuel.

Today is clear and I feel lucky to see the channels and streams running in intricate ribbons across the flat land. More often, this region is completely covered in dense, wet fog. This creates a maze and all of the complexities of where I am would be a hidden secret. This portrait presents a dimension of unfamiliarity—this is not my place, it is not where I belong. It is new territory and this portrait turns into a fleeing memory.

We pause on a sandbar, walk along the flocks of seagulls—hundreds of birds spring and spiral across the sky and I cover my head with rain gear because I know they relieve their bowels in fear if we disrupt them and I do not care to be covered in seagull feces. There is a cacophony, disharmony, orchestration of sound in natural composition. We look for nests set up in the sand, tucked in with grass and old feathers, seaweed. The nests look like rice bowls—buried behind drift wood of all sizes and shapes from across the Gulf of Alaska, simple grasses, any fluff from the surf. They are always set with twigs and logs and gifts brought in by the tide.

There are huge clouds transforming patterns overhead and vast squawking noises from the birds. It is clanging, screeching; too loud to converse with the woman standing right next to me. So, we avoid trying.

The words for my first trip on a drift boat: speed, space, flats, Kings, web, engine, green Victorinox, speeding 25 knots in six feet of water. Mike's advice: Dig through the web and make your hands work like paws. Hold your fingers together so they don't tangle. It is not the same as the seining I'm used to. The single words are just a basic list of observations, I am trying to convey the dimensions of what it feels like to be here. Dialogue occurs naturally but not with the intention of objectively collecting information.

Maybe when I ask people for simple signs of place they don't know where to start. The details are so broad here. The Chugach Mountains are extreme. They are huge. Mount St. Elias has always been a favorite landmark of mine when traveling on my father's boat from Homer to Sitka in the early spring for the commercial herring fishery. It is the peak I knew I could look at from the middle of nowhere in the Gulf of Alaska—nowhere to stop, no way would turn into the harbor at Yakutat, dozens of miles from the shore. I look up and feel satisfied that I know where I am.

On this day: there are mid-year extreme tide cycles. Morning dews with rain drops, but the world is content. Thankful smiles on every face as we give our fish to the elders.

## **Flats**

These are just visions or perceptions—a whirl of thoughts run through my reflections. None of them are necessarily related.

We are in eight inches of water and the mud kicks but the boat's running through it.

We turn the 10 halibut tummy side up so the bruises don't show.

You are supposed to wear boots that you can kick off if you go over and Xtratufs don't do that.<sup>9</sup>

I consider the lost history of the clam cannery. Decayed and hard to find.

The flats changed with the earthquake and clam harvest was never the same again.

There is snow today, in May. More kelp and barnacles.

I see trees. Spruce. Creeks crossing everywhere.

Old pilings with mossy decay, unrecognized, unrecorded.

There are 10 geese on the mud with necks held high and eyes alert.

Fifteen Minke whales eating hooligan.

We see abundant tails and fins and jaws; clearly hungry animals.

And the old pilings again—things are just abandoned by what the surf wants and needs.

Here is an old cannery: a beautiful green door, panels that are grey.

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<sup>9</sup> Xtratuf is a common brand of fishing boots. They are generally tight along the calf and is likely what I was wearing at the time of this trip.

Back in the harbor are speckles, freckles and whispers of rain. I look out at Hinchinbrook and am shocked at the height—I did not expect snow on top. The image looks like a longer stretch of coastline, not an island.

I walk and find the Russian graveyard—the stones convey birth to death dates from the 1900s.

There is one man cleaning fish at the table and everyone who sees him stops to talk casually. He must be local.

### **Copper River Fish Market**

The Copper River Reds really got started as a true market symbol in the early 1980's, Alaska's hearty first salmon of the summer. How did their popularity grow to this level and why? Everyone fished more casually before then but the Red wasn't something that had to be shipped with performance reverence for the first seasonal restaurant cook. It is an interesting feature because it dramatizes the fish and makes it very clearly awe-inspiring—but is it? Where did this marketing arise from? Why and when? Is the Copper salmon *really* substantially more significant and hence a little too much ego for what it actually provides? For example, for the members of drift-fleet who *don't* happen to care solely for the reds and are willing to harvest in other parts of the Sound for other openings, I think I tend to hear less proud bias about the fish quality.

If the fishermen are not persuaded into caring about the quality and value of the fish—does he treat the entire fishery as more simple than those who over-rate an industry that is highly valued and very well marketed but maybe not really that much more significant than any other fishery? It's certainly more valued in the community because the fishermen want the income but in terms of the actual scale of the whole state? It's marketed to industries outside of Alaska—Seattle restaurants, Pike Street. It's boosted in a way that boosts the fishery beyond what it

actually means so possibly creates a sense of vulnerability that is rarely suggested. Marketing suggests and very substantially advocates the value of Copper River Reds—but if they lose that? What other option do they have?

I do not see diverse fishery involvement in Cordova. Salmon it is.

## **May 12**

Cordova has no road out of town. Wind whips down the river bed, none of the geography of up-river is accommodating to roads, railroads. It's been tried before and the landscape wins. There are mountains in every direction except the coast.

Tricky, triangular patterns and lines. I see blue ice, dry trees, and evidential trails of sun. Clouds are low, seamless, edgeless, endless. I stop at the graveyard again—it is inspiring, somehow. Stories must reside, hidden in the graves. More history here, more evidence and drama. Human relations turnover quickly in a small town. Somehow, it makes me nervous to cross the bridge.

Mike and I talk some more and he critically expresses, “I never liked those three hole kayaks—they aren't right. They built them like that so the Russian could sit in the middle and make sure the Natives were paddling harder than they needed to.”

## **First Opening—Night of May 15. Opens at 7AM on May 16.**

This evening is not calm. Captain Mike asks to make sure I am ok with a boat ride for the opening and I am a little hesitant. I'm generally “ok” with rough water but can also get sick; I don't particularly feel like vomiting continuously over the rail of the boat. I tell him that I will be ok. The real (hired) deckhand is literally just lying asleep on the table. It is not a pretty night. It's grey, turbulent and it's going to be a sloshy ride. I physically cannot take any more notes to describe it.

## Thursday May 16

Rough. Fishery opens at 7am. We make one set inside; catch about 11 fish—nothing. There is some hesitancy to “head out”—beyond the islands. But, there’s not much choice. It is sloppy but I promise myself again that I will not get sick. I will stop writing and curl into the bunk if I need to.

The group on the radio is about 10-15 fishermen. They call each other as they witness “hits” against the net from salmon. The radio is constant banter, discuss what it looks like, complaints about the fact that it is snowing, do radio checks where they just say, “Check 1-2-3-4-5. Do you all hear me?” I pay attention but crawl inside the bunk and snuggle into reading, too. Barrett Willowby: *Where the Sun Swings North*. This is a novel about the development of Katalla, once a town with a population of 3,000 on the far east of PWS. Now? That community no longer exists.

## Friday May 17

Another day with flakes of snow! I am still on the fishing boat, headed back to the harbor. Water is streaming down the window in small trickles. All of this fog and rain and drips and I just look out at it and nod and agree with why there needs to be so many ways to say water. This is wetland. It is a coastal rain land, braids of water, ribbons of water, gusts of water, bubbles of water. There are also whitecaps.

Somewhere this evening in the social deluge of meeting everyone again, there is guitar, voice, melody. I hear a bass tenor and testimony in harmony. There are notes picked and sketched. And there is percussion that lets you work all day. In my own nervous energy, I spin rings all day and feel the smooth of gold. I see men weaving on the docks. Weaving a long line; wearing

a ring on their own neck because you don't wear a wedding ring and expect your fingers to be safe in the nets.

It makes me think of what it would mean to interpret this scene with music? Instead, I chose poetry (see "Prince William Sound Poetry Set"). By the memory of all the harbor sounds: squawk, howling sea gulls, pounding metal, lines and buoys hissing together as the boats rise and fall with the harbor flow. I hear a diesel engine (or two or three), cannery lines pulling the weight of fish bags, the drop of slimy, bloody fish, slamming doors, boots on the ramp. I hear breaking tide sounds, anchor chains and engines revved up to move.

The snow line is still all the way to the water.



## **Prince William Sound Poetry Set**

These 11 short pieces, intentionally composed as poetry, are personal observations on a trip with a local fisherman to the first island in the line-up of barriers at the mouth of the Copper River. Dimensions of the poems include responses to personal emotions, physical features I observed both on the water and on the beach and interpretations of visual details.

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**August 18, 2015**

### **Watching a Wake of Disappointment**

There is something accelerating, buoyant here in the depths of Prince William Sound.

Can a life plan opportunely deteriorate by just humbly letting go?

Possibly taking something else instead? Have I lost something irreplaceable?

Sun streams into the deep water valley of Esther Passage and I try to release.

I imagine exit, "No Return."

Esther Island to the southwest and Chugach National Forest on the mainland.

The channel is a narrow; pairs of otters perform beach to beach.

All the waterfalls, new but quickly accepted displays of vertical rush, are from the past days of streaming rain.

As a passenger (not a deckhand) the simple run of a boat is enough for a sense of achievement.

My motion for the day is a shift.

Here is a space, a place—flat rocks stand up to the water. Let the water do what it will, the rocks remain.

Tiny islands each hold a solo, solemn tree.

This is what all-petite uninhabited islands, the mainland simply mean.

Simple, proud, wise.

Here was the challenge of oil. Here were so many explorations. But the trees, the rocks—all stand tall and remain an icon of their own. A goat crosses a trail by the upper glacier. Another mother goat with three young ones wobbling the rocks for a grassy lunch.

Today the sun scolds time and suggests a look ahead instead of resentment with the drizzly past.

## **August 17**

### **Cathedral Rainforest**

Green Castle

Fairy large fronds of skunk cabbage,

Charmed streams appear from hours, material dreams of vapor and fog.

Sponge of moss, soft carpet beneath each step. Six inches of soaking water.

Mist, berry trees, pushki<sup>10</sup>, moss, fallen trees and newborns growing along the bark;

Timeworn horizontal clan gives strength, health to dozens of fresh shoots.

Reverent spruce towers, cool peace below the leaves.

I feel my head buttressed, eyes focus up.

Quiet support.

What do I look up to?

No ardent prayer to any one path.

Conscious of where distinct faith exists:

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<sup>10</sup> Cow Parsnip.

I recall ritual calls to prayer in Indonesia. I stopped work, writing, planning and listened to song from the rickety speakers across campus.

During the holiday of Ramadan my students would leave in the midst of the course—dutifully attend and return. Hungry but expecting sunset call.

And here, in a pillar of trees, I feel similar. I can or must sit in this rain; the curtain provides a wrap of hope and support.

Incessant drops take away my own chaos of interpretation and assert, a natural authority, “Just sit. Calmly. Stop thinking. For just a minute. Can you stay a minute more?”

And here, time passes easily without requisite. I imagine where the water came from, how the emerald comes and goes each year.

It was not like this to try and meditate in a hospital bed. There I smelled the stench of bleach and replica of dispositions lost, it was bland and dry. It was thoughtless.

What do humans teach by medicine? Do they at all? Do they teach the right things?

What’s right? Hope, spirit, sustainability.

My humanity is ambition, consequence, frustration, and irritation.

**August 21, 2015**

### **Ghost Fish**

They are white salmon; dead and drifting.

Spawned out. Life given, gone. Procreation accomplished or not. It no longer matters.

They fled to the stream but it may have been wrong.

The hatchery fish are dim; they don’t have a mind.

They don't have a home.

They don't have a light to a path to a real place.

Small fry do not matter or might never exist in the first place.

And the hatcheries run and run and run. Replacing fish regardless of what a salmon should naturally do.

Lying resigned on the beach, colorless. Eyeless. Arrest.

### **Glacier Shelf**

Cross the threshold, beach rocks to grass to alders to spruce draped in finery.

Just feet off shore the boat revs and roars; the sound is adjacent.

But, in a way it's not there, absent, gone.

An hour or two pass but the time doesn't matter. Time stands still.

Give the glacier an established name and it must not move.

Reality: transition is constant. The alders breed the moss. Dense, green dirt adamantly nurtures hoods of mushroom stock.

"Animal tracks," "Deer Antler with Mold," "Huckleberry patch of August 21."

### **Rainwater**

Out the window rain syncopates the surface;

Constantly modified drops flock the top of the ocean.

At one glance it is sparks from a dying fire, a subway door opening for impatient travelers in Boston, it's a market in Padang, it's a caress on my arm, it's a pesky mosquito.

It falls in scars of tiny valleys; flares cover the sight line as dense as our green wool camping blanket.

It presses the salt water away; white eruptions where the ocean lost her place.  
She'll get it back and take the rest of it in.

### **Bloodline**

What do you think about all day?  
Fish? Children? Losses? Hopes?  
How can I be so preoccupied by change?  
How can I accept anything that has come to be permanent when I hate it all?  
There are song lines that repeat over and over. A beat and rhythm and tune.  
To make it stop, I play something else;  
By unending monologue or by tangible melody.  
I browse the shore and wonder, to myself, if it is common for constant interior communication.

### **Bloodline II**

Something about a golden half-moon.  
There is stage light on the water. A direct path.  
Tonight there is half a face: a smirk, a sleepy drone, a frown?  
At the end of the day I still smell the fresh water on the back of the salmon—even though they  
ran a river through vacuum to slide.  
It is the same as the first morning smell.  
Later, the giant spoon of the dipper. Another spot light, the Aurora also throws a spear.  
The boys on the back deck are casual and heedless: where will this winter take them?  
They talk with ease. The banter has no sense of contemplation.

It reminds me of Massachusetts—I leaned in a swing on the back porch of a giant white house. Old, antique and set precise and accurate to the street block. Streetlights gave their own lunar light.

There were so many youth there—I was their age but somehow fit with the latter.

Though, admittedly, I had no set plans yet. Nothing stood in the way of arbitrary choice.

I recall one deckhand who waited patiently for conversation each night on the porch swing by the garage with a cooler, a lighter.

But, here, is the water of Prince William Sound, Gulf of Alaska. August and the summer is over.

Here it shifts from the clouded storm, an impassioned and never answered plea.

Here, it is just presence. Those arbitrary conversations kindle and rekindle easily;

No grit to recall later.

Closure, composition follows semantics of this cove.

### **Fish Kiss**

We kiss the first bright salmon; he is on his way

Let him go through the boat wash to make it home.

Kiss the last, put him away with the end of the season.

The boat's wake leaves a summer sigh of debris, foam—a departure where we look to the capes.

The beach behind us is a tomb, a fortune trunk.

Cans are left, tossed aside, waiting for decomposition.

### **Visions from the Archives**

Descriptions of this series of photos came from one of my earliest visits to Cordova when the museum was still in the “old” building. Since then, it has moved into a much larger multi-use building that also houses the library and city hall. At the time, the photos were not nearly as organized as they are now. They were semi-organized by year but not distinctly cataloged, defined or separated into numerically identified envelopes as they are now. With the approval of the curator, director and other museum employees, the way I referenced the photos was to simply browse the stacks with the intention of getting a sense of the community history from a visual perspective. I was very new to the community and could tell from the physical structure of the town’s geographical layout and some of the oldest buildings that it has a more dense history than some of the newer communities in the state.

Now, they are in orderly file cabinets and are substantially more systematized. The numbers that identify the pictures are based on who contributed the photos to the museum; usually the donors name is included as well. If they had been like this when I studied them originally, the task of writing a description of the photos as a sense of community history probably would have been slightly different. When I studied them, the scene was casual. It felt like going through family pictures and influenced the tone of the conversations that I had with the museum director and one other staff member in the room. It made the whole experience more intimate--everything was kind of thrown into boxes and semi-unorganized. In the new setting, I would have had to treat the images like formal specimens. Though the material is still organized by hand-written descriptions on three-ring binder paper, the way a researcher can see what each photo shows is like this table below. Please refer to my first photo description to demonstrate how my interpretation compares to what is composed in the archives.

Table 3: Cordova Historical Museum Photo Description

<i>Account</i> #	<i>Date</i>	<i>Donor</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>CH-67-1-1</i>		<i>Dave Kozachuk</i>	<i>3 ½ X 10 7/8 BW. Photocraft Cordova, Alaska. “Fish Strike at Pete Dahl Slough.” 1926.</i>

In descriptions, I have intended to explain what is captured by the photo as clearly as possible but in some cases my narrative also interprets what I may be failing to see as an outsider to the region, or, in cases where there are images of people, I describe what they are doing and possibly why. Limitations of my interpretation seem particularly evident in pictures where there are mixed cultural groups—both those who are native to the region and those who are not. When I started this composition I was looking specifically for historic pictures of the fishing industry—the fleet, the canneries, the gear and technical devices but there were other community pictures that caught my attention and those are referenced as well.

I originally chose the pictures to share in this piece because when I explored the old museum archives they looked so strikingly similar to how the community appears today. Many of the buildings, the Anchor Bar and Grill, for example, though more worn, are still present. First Street, though it does have newer buildings, has not experienced a dramatic modification since some of the earliest pictures available. The local canneries were prevalent in the early 1900’s just as they are today; there have been some fires and some physical transitions with events like the 1964 earthquake but the resemblances still exist.



I was inspired to include some of the Katalla photos because the oil community developed about the same time Cordova did but on the other side of the Copper River. Though originally an important oil drilling site, the community was abandoned in approximately 1948. Also, many of the older Cordova residents originally lived there.

When I returned to the museum in August of 2017, I found that a large portion of what I describe here, the section 90-165 series, are now missing from the currently reorganized listings. The organization jumps from photo number 90-114-4 to 91-8. This presents a dilemma because though the material was originally available for me to describe and possibly use in a presentation, it is no longer easy to locate.

In a way, using imagery with somewhat obscure or completely absent descriptions reminds me of the physical reality of what Cordova is like today for someone who is not a resident. The community has many very old buildings, semi-destroyed vessels or vessels over aged in the harbor that will probably never run again. There are old shops and buildings with plastic covering holes in the wall or with plywood over windows. There is a Russian Orthodox graveyard right as one enters town that has always caught my attention and I have taken pictures of it because it reminds me of the Ninilchik Russian Orthodox graveyard on the Kenai Peninsula. The historic photographs and aging structures of this town are a window into the history of the community and this lead me to write about the images I found.

The current composition status of this is not directly designed for performance. If this piece were to be presented to an audience, I would recompose the notes from each photo so that it reads more poetically, like scene descriptions, perhaps. Also, like the interviews, I would remove the first-person pronoun “I” that refers to myself. If possible, for example, if the photos were digital and available to include in a performance, I would use them to capture and

compliment my written narrative. The actual visual features might resonate distinctly in personal ways for audience members from Cordova.

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CH-67-1

Fish Strike at Pete Dahl Slough, 1926

Here are larger tenders, with house forward, pulling skiffs. There is a strike in progress, no one is fishing. No chop on the water. I possibly see Hinchinbrook in the background? I do not recognize the area well-enough yet. I realize this as I go out to wind my way through the old road and try and find something in the trails. I sense everything as best as I can but have no recollection of it.

CH-67-1-9

Fish strike on the flats, 1926. The photo is labeled as “stray fishermen.” They are stray because they’re not undertaking their hired labor. The strike is likely for a company that had hired skippers, the fishermen were not independently employed as they are now. They were typically paid a daily wage.

CH-67-1-15

Dave Kozechuk, Welding the railroad tracks, sitting with cliff and trees in the background. 1920.

Where are those tracks now? Did they flood away? Washed with all this water? Railroad handcar—looks like a little bicycle set to the width of the tracks.

CH-67-1-21

Here is an image with a big building labeled very clearly “Sourdough”—a big sign with moose antlers, a man wearing knee high boots, a tie, and a cocked hat. A truck piled high with gear and tied down tight. 1932.

I think it is a railway stop.

CH-67-2

Copper River Railroad. 1926. Image of the Million Dollar Bridge.

CH-67-2-4

Collapsed railroad bridge. Collapse and remodel? Bridge and guide wires completely distorted into the river flats.

CH-67-2-10

Leaving Cordova wharf for Child’s Glacier. July 1, 1936. Smoke, careful structure to the buildings reminds me of toy buildings. The windows are perfect squares. Set simply and accurately. There is an octagon shaped building in the background. Several people stand on the platform and old cars with curved hoods are pulled up on the boardwalk.

CH67-2-14

Cordova’s first street, date estimate is pre-1932. This street does not look shockingly different today. The view is north from the Cordova hotel. The Alaskan Hotel, where there is still a bar today, has the same looking front. Street signs hang down, two men, 10 vehicles. The shops have obvious glass fronts and supportive posts.

CH67-2-15

A January night in Cordova. The telephone and electrical lines are barren here, mounds of snow fully covering the street, piled high—almost as if covered by an avalanche. There are men hip deep out in the snow, on the street. Huge deep tracks in the snow from a cart of some kind. Wires cross—old, antique lights line carefully along the street front. The town shows the physical composition of a constructed community, a standardized orderly design. The stores include Alaska Steamship Company, the Northern, Blum O’Neil Company and Smith’s Rooming House. But, the wind closes everything. In a way, it looks very cozy despite the chill of snow.

CH67-2-30

Down by the water. New England Fish Company, Carlisle Packing. Built in 1916. Boats are all house forward and have the same organized and categorized parallel imagery as the buildings. They are aligned a careful row, sturdy and straight. Everything looks wood, ramps, piers, buildings, vessels. Six buildings are stacked exactly against each other with no spare space. The construction seems set for people who are smaller than us today—the style must have asked for intricacy.

CH67-2-34

Someone’s handwriting finds humor in labeling a photograph as “Eyak Boulevard.” The dirt and mud curve around a corner road.

CH67-3-2

Kokanini slough. There was a cannery. Looks like the boats are waiting to load or unload—sandbags and piled lumber. Each boat is lined by a wheel tied to the side—kind of like a bumper. There are no other buoys.

CH67-3-3

A man rows a wooden boat, with a slight shed on the bow. It almost looks like a tent of fabric not wood. Six small puppies also balance on the bow. The man is facing aft. There is a roller posted directly on the stern. I don't think the shed is a sail, but it may be?

CH67-3-6

Independence Day Egg Race. Yakutat, Alaska on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1932. In an egg race you hold an egg on a spoon and run and hope it doesn't splash you with the slime of yolks. Skirts and heels are obvious on the Native women, white men line up in the background with formal attire. Smiling but not participating. There are at least 30 men, maybe more.

CH-67-3-21

Cordova High school, girls basketball team. Six women (Shirley Foley, Edna Shepherd, Mable Bang, Eleanor Kozachuk, Grace Dooley, Gretchen De Leo) are wearing very high-waist shorts; all have short hair curled around their ears. Their shoes look miserably uncomfortable, like quick cut "mary-janes" or little canvas sneakers. 1929. Coach is a man, holding a ball that says CHS 1929.

CH-57-4-22-25

Sailing vessel Northwestern fully covered in (very dangerous) looking ice. The ice covers all lines, vessel sides, any structures. There are at least 4 men in the series of photos.

CH 71-10-56-63

New England Cannery Fire. Blazing fire in first pictures, Substantial debris and burnt docks. 1943.

72-4-1

President Harding in Cordova.

93-10-1

Huge collision of water or flood or avalanche deluge on First Street in Katalla, a natural disaster of some kind. Maybe an earthquake. It's hard to see where the water is flowing from but the wood looks like driftwood and boardwalk. Splintered, broken. Really, fully smashed. I notice when I try to understand the natural details here that landslides look very common. I see trees that are thrown down a hill with mud, roots torn out. The picture is also interesting because it shows Katalla as a very developed community that happens to show imagery very similar to Cordova.

93-10-102-107

Side view of Childs Glacier, Mile 5 Glacier, these glaciers are covering the flats, the ice is much farther down into the valley than what is visible now. The water at the bottom looks like a lake.

93-10-113-115

A vista of Copper River—wide spread, clouds closing down, snowy mountains in the background. Rivulets on the delta, streams running through the sand and mud. Pillows of snow, trees covered with deep white puffs. A creek flows through it. Some of the trains aren't operational because the snow is so deep.

93-10-21

Katalla photos—birds eye view, many buildings, one image of five Native women very dressed up with hats, capes, shawls. One of the women looks significantly different from the other four. She woman looks like she is from the northern interior and the others from Southeast—Tlingit area.

93-10-3

Here is a chinked log cabin, two men sit facing each other. Both appear engaged in serious discussion but they also look posed. The man on the left looks younger and the man on the right is losing hair. The title is labeled "Bachelor quarters." It is 1903 in Katalla, Alaska. An oil lamp is on top of the desk-organized carefully, a typewriter sits in the middle, the keys fully separated, round. Suspenders, a double row of buttons stream down the shirt of the younger man. Unorganized pegs line the wall. There are hats and wool pants, water jugs, a leather briefcase hung tossed casually on the pegs. A picture of a woman is posted on the wall; it's more of a poster. She is fully clothed but I think it's meant to be a pin-up poster of an attractive woman. Her upper chest and neck show skin but all else is covered, a shawl tossed casually over her arm. Her hair is pinned back. The exterior of the cabin is jokingly labeled "Suburban Home"—small, icicles hanging off the roof in all places. A small chimney juts out.

A nearby image shows a 1907 street scene—there's not really a street, just a dirt path but the buildings are fully constructed. One posts a sign that says, "Cigar Store."

93-10-61

Here is a bar with seven men, one man distinctly Native. There is a bartender behind the counter and glasses and a cash register. There is a lamp hanging down and liquor to purchase—about eight bottles on the shelf. There is an image of a large naked woman posted above the register, she is lounging on her side with an arm in the air. The photo looks funny because only one of the men is looking at the camera, he's one of the youngest. And, his glance is the most intense. The Native boy in the picture is looking down, holding his shoulders slumped. He looks nervous.

Hands set in the pockets, suit jackets and ties—all these men look like they're about 35 years old.

93-10-67

"Fishermen's Lunch" rows of herring, rows of salmon.

93-10-XX

Here is a Columbia River sailboat. The image is labeled "white man and a squaw with their baby boy." Is that truly the way to describe it?



93-10-90

Clam digging on the flats—there are four people in the picture, three are older women wearing long rain gear/ outdoor gear. All have long sticks for the clams. They look active and smiling. Happy as clams? All the faces are casual and calm. Mountains stack up in the background.

03-41-10

Ladies on the pier. They look charming and friendly; they have their arms around each other. A full size building on floats, bigger than full size. A floating cannery at Bering River, moved to Esther Island and then Anderson Bay to can crabs, 1947.

90-165-37

Jack Coulter, “the Club”—10 men sprawled outside a bar on Front St. Describe the 10 men. There used to be a club liquor store in town, is this the same? There is one man who looks directly at the camera and the rest are distracted.

90-165-51

Bering River piers in ruins. Glass beach, trash bottles and barrels are strewn everywhere. This is how I imagine the Seldovia glass beach looked in the 1930’s.

May 12, 1906

Cordova is a boardwalk, a series of old houses, those perfect framed windows. Abercombie canyon on the Copper. Sheridan glacier, seen from the Copper—mud, trees, a long shallow glacier stream?

90-165-63

Herring canneries, salted in barrels and marketed to Scandinavia. There was a big cannery by La Touche. It was called a bait fishery. That herring industry was open from about 1920-WWII. A woman and I chat about the salteries along the coast of Alaska—in Seward, in Seldovia, in Halibut Cove. The industry was brief. But, those fish look big.

90-165-75

Cordova Bay with tall ships, lines detailed with festive flags. Each ship has three masts. Three ships in the picture all anchored away from each other. One on the far left, one on the far right and one in the middle. The hills, with snow, are an obvious background.

90-165-84

Cold, snowy street. Businesses labeled Turkish baths, a sign advertising “rye.” The Corner Drug Store, Clayson the Clothier, Boots and Shoes and Repairs, Alaska Transfer Company, The Alaska Barber shop, Whites.

90-165-98

A wood kayak, summer, a man sitting solo, maybe it is a canoe.

90-165-107

On a pier looking into town, everything is on pilings—not identified as Cordova. A little boy is balanced on the railing. A few other pictures show a little girl sitting with twin baby boys on some pillows on moss.

Boy scouts eating Ghirardelli chocolate and jumping into Lake Eyak, leaning against a US flag pole, there is another flag of Alaska. They sit on a narrow bridge with boots laced up to their knees, ankles carefully crossed.

There is a man with short sleeves and suspenders, holding a spotted baby seal. Holding it carefully, smiling down, cuddled. The seal doesn't look nervous, either. Four men sit on the deck of a boat with a barrel, two recently killed deer that were hung by their feet and an old pile of net and wood corks.

Maybe collecting sea gull eggs? There is a man holding the wings of a seagull and they're sitting drift wood logs. Northern Market Meats and Amanda's laundry. Miss Cordova in a fur coat—approximate 1942. Huge moose antlers at a hunting camp, many pictures of Black bears. Eccles, Eyak peak?

Steam Ship Saratoga loading copper ore.

Within the Cordova museum:

A note:

“Pay to the order of Lund Utness, Seven dollars and thirty-five cents (7.35) on the terms of fifteen cents (.15) advanced interest, 8% for the first year and 12% for following years. To be paid when the signer catches and marries the signee, Lund Utness. December 2, 1920.”

They were married.

## **Fish Traps and Statehood**

This story evolved from a series of telegrams between a salmon trap repair man who worked for the Hubbell and Waller Engineering Corporation in Seattle, Washington. Appendix C: “The Records of Hubbell and Waller, 1920-1939” was the basis for the five-page piece titled “The Traps—Hinchinbrook, Eastern Prince William Sound.” The material for this piece came from the UAF Alaska Polar Regions Collection, Hubbell and Waller Records. The full bibliographic listing for the archives referred to are located at the conclusion of that appendix. The archival pieces were considered when I wrote a paper titled “Historical Transitions in Access and Management of Alaska’s Commercial Fisheries, 1880-1980” that was published in World Fisheries: A Social-Ecological Analysis edited by Ommer et al in 2011<sup>11</sup>. But, the following version was composed specifically to present at the Astoria, Oregon FisherPoet event in 2014, it was not a part of the originally published chapter. This piece is likely the most imaginative of the portraits but it is fully based on textual data in the telegrams crafted into a story format.

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### **The Traps--Hinchinbrook, Eastern Prince William Sound**

It was 1928; we moved from Spokane out to Tacoma. I know Maggie didn’t want to do it, she was so accustomed to that eastern side of the state. Her mother lives out there! Her father was a farmer and her sisters, she has four of them, they all help run that farm now. When we moved

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<sup>11</sup> The full citation for this is located in the bibliography of chapter 3.

east, first I worked for the Washington State Department of Transportation. Our agency built that road from the east to the west, it happened quick. Everybody wanted it right then; there was constant chatter about how we needed to connect to Seattle. And it was true. The State just put us up in trailers and bunkers as we went along—camping our way along the road. The major pass was over Ellensburg, but I spent more of my time in the east.

Before that, I worked for the railroad. But, I was ready to be back on the coastal side of the state and I thought Maggie might like it once she got used to it. I started looking around for something to keep me occupied in the summer. Tacoma has all the ferry systems and the shipping, it seemed like there'd have to be some kind of work there. But, just in case, I thought maybe of Vancouver, too.

I had a couple friends out around Seattle and I'd check in with them to see if they'd heard of anything. There was this company building all those new salmon traps up in Alaska. Sounded like they were doing pretty good, it was Hubbell and Waller and I thought I'd try there. It was the middle of April. I was 25 and they hired me right away to take that steamer up to Seward on June 1<sup>st</sup>. My wage was going to be \$150, paid on the first of the month. I'd never been north, I didn't really know what I needed in Alaska and I couldn't bring much with me. Just a bedroll and clothes. The next day I got a telegram that said they wanted me to leave earlier—I'd hardly met these guys but I was ready to go.

Mr. Waller was pretty formal in most of his letters. He wrote to me: "Dear Sir" and was careful to explain exactly where I was to work and when. Things were moving up there! Those traps were the newest things and boy, they worked! I don't know how those guys kept the files all in order—I think Boss told me he had maybe 150 boxes of files to keep track of the clients. Some of 'em had 50 or 80 different traps in different places, some of 'em only had one

or two. Those bigger companies, that's how we really made the money. The smaller ones were stingy and they weren't used to building the traps—things went wrong sometimes. They tried to just keep up with them, just patches here and there.

Prince William Sound is a rough spot—especially out there on Hinchinbrook and Montague Islands. They're in the Gulf, the entryway into Prince William Sound and out on the southside of the mountains, the water always goes completely to Hell! Sometimes things will stay in place for a single tide and then they'd get all twisted and we'd lose the gear. Everything was messed up. The on-site guys get frustrated and that weather sure didn't help; sometimes it looked to me like they just couldn't build the traps right in the first place! They'd pour the cement wrong and then the whole thing fouled up. You try to reach Boss in Seattle and he can't even imagine what it looks like up here. You don't get wind and waves like that in Seattle and he's never really seen anything like it. Puget Sound is glass compared to this water.

I just picture some of those flats! The waves just roll and roll. You look out there and all you see are the grey mounds, great hills of water. And try to get out in a dory to get to the pilings? No. There's no way. Maggie would never let me do it if she knew what it looked like. Didn't matter what I decided to bring. Nothing stays dry for more than a minute or two.

There are a lot of times when I really feel stuck out there—that's when I just take to the same activities as the rest of the men in the cannery. At the end of the day after all that sand and fog and I'm totally soaked, at least they share the scotch they've got and we pass around a tin of tobacco. Everybody lounges up in the bunkhouse trying to keep his feet off the cots. At least, maybe, they can sleep dry? Doubt it. If the sun peaks out, we might head to the steps at the mess hall. I'm supposed to be rooming in the guest quarters but I'd rather stay out with the guys. I usually just end up on an empty bunk up there—it's not too cold in the summer. I always remind

Boss to send me up some gin. He just ignores me. I keep writing for it. Maybe they'll surprise me next time. They don't know what we need to bear the season.

A couple weeks ago, I set up a trap with the New England Fish Company that only lasted 4 days! That was a bad one—the weather just went completely Bolshevik on the first attempt and then I had to waste another three days waiting for a shipment from Cordova. I thought it was all going good but no, Damn it! I'm ready to make that run down to Ketchikan—that's the spot.

Basic equipment is scarce—I was told there'd be rig stations to use but I haven't found a single one. They're about as scarce as virgins in a brothel! That doesn't help set the traps—I lose quite a few, and I just don't think it's entirely my fault. I gotta have the gear I need! All the canneries just think I can throw it up with nothing. I write time and again to the company because they need to send me everything that got lost on the way. It takes so long sometimes I figure I may as well buy a house in Cordova and send for Maggie. If she doesn't like Tacoma, maybe she'd be impressed with this little town. There are some ladies here.

I better have the bosses send her a check today. I just end up spending 'em in town. I got over to Seward once and that's really the big city—took a night out on the town, found a place to stay. Those city spots sure don't help with spending money. But, if I get it to Maggie first I know she won't waste it on the bad stuff. I know she gets into the city for mail pretty often so she'll get that check pretty soon.

I really miss her; I sure hope she doesn't give up and head back east before I get home. There are just too many men up here.

## **When the Oil Spilled**

This is based on an interview with the man who was mayor of Cordova at the time of the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. A distinction of this interview and the opinions shared is that the speaker was clearly accustomed to public speaking and there were very few questions I asked him; his commentary transpired almost as a monologue. He was more prepared to inform me of what he thought I should hear than I was to ask the questions to formulate my own research interests. Also, as he discusses the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, the tone that he uses and the carefully chosen words made me skeptical of how straightforward his account was. He did not project the same kind of candid demeanor witnessed with other interviewees. One of the individuals who reviewed this piece suggested that the use of this particular term--“skeptical”--does not provide readers with the accurate understanding of what I might mean. I do not believe this individual was attempting to mislead me in his commentary, but it was just more formal than many of the other pieces. His responses were polished and formulated over years of discussing the same topic and the specific influence of the oil spill to the community. He had a preconceived representation of the event that he thought I should hear regardless of what the questions were tailored to ask.

As such, the character portrait conveyed here has a more synthetic dimension than some of the other portraits that provided more holistic features of their community engagement. Specifically, the contrast between this piece and “Fish Mom” and the reviews received from that provide an interesting comparison.

In review, a reader provided the following comment: “I’m confused by this ending. It seems to just end. Can you maybe circle back to tie the ending in with something in the story?” In a way, I appreciate this comment because it demonstrates a dimension of the dialogue I had with



the speaker, his very personal narration of the event. When he is finished with it, there is no remaining casual conversation between us. It is a blunt ending and there is no further discussion.

The entire transcript of this interview is available as Appendix E to demonstrate how little of the document changed.

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I consider Cordova my home; I have lived here for more than twenty-five years. What originally brought me here is kind of a long story. In short, my wife and I were ocean kayak guides in Prince William Sound before we settled here in 1987. We spent all summer out in the Sound from the beginning of May until the end of September every year. In the fall, we'd work at home doing graphic art and fine art of our own. At that point, we were living in Anchorage. I taught cross-country skiing for the municipality of Anchorage—there was a new ski school. But, in the mid-80's there was kind of a downturn in the oil economy—which I know is kind of hard to believe.

But, the state is very tied to the oil industry, currently, and has been for many years. So, it was kind of a case of a “falling tide lowers all vessels.” People were losing money even though they weren't directly connected to the oil industry. People were leaving the state—they were walking away from mortgages because they couldn't find buyers. We weren't directly involved—just small contracts, doing fine art out of our home. But, we got a lot of our jobs from ad agencies that had lots of work and weren't staffed to take care of it all so they would contract it out to people like us. And, they weren't getting the work so neither were we.

We had come to Cordova many times to see the bird migration here and had always admired the place. When the bookstore came available we decided to buy it because most of the economy for the community was based on fish, you know? We thought because of the fish we

wouldn't be affected by the rest of the state's woes and downturns in the oil industry. If we moved here, we'd be unaffected by adverse oil impacts. So, we moved in 1987—two years before the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Now that makes me laugh; it was kind of ironic.

But, the spill didn't stop us from leaving. I like it here a lot and can compare it to some of the other mid-size Alaska coastal communities. I have kind of a theory about the place. I was a submarine sailor during the cold war back in the 60's and we would often stay submerged—with missile firing submarines for like three months—87 consecutive days is my personal record. I used to think we were all kind of super normal to be confined like that and get along for a long period of time. Then, I realized, after awhile that we're not normal at all. We're all kind of flippy! Just flippy in the same direction. That's kind of what it's like here. It's not a village but it is remote—it takes a while to get here. The demographics are such that my little book store works, I mean Barnes and Noble can't compete with me in this town. It's too small. Other franchises—McDonald's, Subway—all that. None of that can compete. The demographics are such that the economy of scale would not work for them. It's all pretty much “mom and pop” around here. The fishermen fish for themselves, they don't fish in fleets. Really there is nothing to keep you here. It's remote. It rains a lot. 150 inches of rain per year. It's dark a lot. There are no malls. There're no icons of American modern culture. You can't really be ambivalent—do I like this place or not? You really know one way or the other. If you don't like it—there's nothing to keep you here. So you leave. It's not like Valdez where you might be taken up by the oil industry to work from Louisiana or Oklahoma—where you think the real world is and you hate the place. You just hate it and you can't wait to get out of this Godforsaken place and get back to the real world, you know? You hear that a lot in Valdez. You never hear it here. Never.

For whatever goofy reason that people like it here—they do. Because if you don't? You're gone. Basically, it's a town for people who like being here. It's very pleasant.

This opinion is not true for all age groups. Children and kids, they always want to get out. It's not like I was born here. I came here by choice. Some young people move back, some don't. We certainly wouldn't have done that where I was born and grew up in California! I kind of think of Cordova as a gated community. There are no roads. We can't get busloads of people coming in. It's too shallow. No cruise ships. We haven't got those largest varieties. They can't dock. It's too shallow. They would need some kind of shuttle to get in and out to the ship. They would have to anchor out and lighter in.

There was a small cruise ship—maybe 500 people—that came for about two years. It was a really bad fit. Nobody liked it. We didn't care for the people; they didn't care for us. Most people on cruise ships are looking for shopping experiences between Vancouver and Seward. We don't have ivory and jade and gold. We don't have totem poles and Sourdoughs reciting Robert Service. A lot of these places kind of turn into caricatures of themselves and so, in the winter time, they just close up. Cordova is a real working town! Folks come in and ask what we do in the wintertime? Well, Hello? Do you think we're just here to serve you as you pass through in the summer? We don't say that, of course. We've been to other places where that is the case. We don't depend on tourism here. We have independent travelers but not very many! You're limited but it's like a gated community. You can come on the ferry boat or you can come on the plane. Only so many at a time. Only so many per day. And, your name is on a list somewhere and you've probably been through security before you got here.

The fishermen who come who don't live here are what you call seasonal residents—it's the same people every year. They just don't live here through the winter for whatever reason. They

do something else in the winter. Fishermen here—have what you might call a diversified portfolio—maybe they have a salmon permit, their halibut permit, cod—or they might fish Bristol Bay as well as this area. So, if one fishery is not really killing them then another one might be. They're never going to totally crash. They don't have all their eggs in one basket. For the seasonal residents, it's the same people who come back every year and it's kind of nice. We recognize them. You know, Cordova is not really a transient place—if you just show up and walk the docks to try to get a job on a boat? Good luck! They don't want somebody who doesn't know anything! They want somebody who knows how to fish, knows boats, knows port from starboard. All that stuff. Someone who knows power blocks and hydraulics. Whatever.

True, this is a big fishing port. It's a big port in the state. There is a lot of work—but you can't just take people off the street. They really, really don't. There's liability. You know? I keep hearing that the last few years have been good years and it's getting even harder to find jobs.

You have to work really hard—the economy here is based on fish! It's a renewable resource and it's responsibly managed—other places depend on tourism or oil. Or, some other kind of artificial base of their economy—they have to deal with a lot more fluctuation than we do. Our basic product is food. So, in the past recession, for example, in the lower 48? We weren't affected here. At all.

Here's what I think about the lasting impacts of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Well, I got this little scar here on my forehead. Probably in 1972—I got it rock climbing. It's still there. It will be there until I die. It's just a little reminder of an event that happened a long time ago. That's just the way it is. It's not going to go away. I live with it. It doesn't hurt. It's not disfiguring. But, there it is. It's the same thing with the EVOS. People were affected in direct proportion to

the amount of connection they had with the Sound. A lot of people who had no connection to the Sound thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread! They could make a lot of money, they didn't really care about this place. In Valdez, people were toasting Joe Hazelwood in the bars because the disaster brought so much money to so many people. That wasn't the case here. The villages were more severely affected—because of literal subsistence and natural resource. Lower cash economy. Here, that's not the case—we're somewhere between village life and mainstream American monoculture. We fish but don't just eat fish. We sell it. But, we depend on a healthy environment for living—just like the Native people did. Everybody here was very seriously affected—not just economically but also sociologically, psychologically. Commercial fishermen are really kind of unnecessary in an economic way. You know where these salmon are going—they're going up river. You could put a weir across the Copper River and let exactly the right amount go up so that they have for next year. And, then pass it out to people. That really gives no reward for hard work or good seamanship or good weather knowledge or good fish sense or good boat maintenance—there's no reward for that if you just pass the fish out. The people who do this—you know, in the book store, I'm not in this for the money. I didn't want to make money—I just thought this would be a great job to have. It's the same thing with fish. I think people do it more for the virtue inherent in the activity instead of the money they make.

For our fishermen, it's a lot different occupation than factory fishing—like the big trawlers or crabbing. It's a different thing. In those cases, it's more money oriented or corporate oriented. Here, it's just local people. Pretty much, gill-netting. Think of economy of scale such that it couldn't attract big factory operations. Plus, limited entry—there's only so many people who can have a permit. So, the population doesn't really change here—there's only so many fish,

only so many fishermen for limited entry permits. Only so many groceries or fuel. Or mending their nets or Xtratufs, Grundens, whatever. Growth is just not going to happen. As long as the fishery is well managed. It's been like this since the railroad went away. We had pretty much the same population in 1937.

Yeah, before that (1937) it wasn't a fishery at all. When the copper went away, the copper companies left behind all the workers. The workers didn't get rich, but really wanted to. Everyone who was in Alaska at that time wasn't here for quality of life. They were here to make a lot of money and live the life they were accustomed to. That didn't happen. So, when the railroad went away—pretty much everybody wanted to convert the old railway bed to a highway. Because they thought, “well, shit, tourists like this scenery stuff. So, maybe they'll come down the same corridor and bring the same wealth that the copper industry used to.”

But, it didn't happen. For a number of reasons. The railway went away in '37. And the oil and gas had a big war that involved most of the world. Resources were diverted to that activity. But, following the war when there was a lot of prosperity—they started thinking about it again. A lot of the people who had lived here, the boomers, had died or moved away. Attrition. The people who took their place, didn't come to take their place because that wasn't going to happen. They just liked it here, or they wanted to fish. Commercial fishing was great, there was lots of fish, blah, blah, blah. It went through a lot of different processes. A lot of people made a run at building the Copper River Highway. Which would have been a whole thing! It would have opened the entire river to sport fishermen? Those numbers are not limited, really. If you want to go sport fishing, you can just go to the grocery store and get a permit and catch fish. It's not as regulated as commercial fishing which is limited.

And, in some ways, the community is happy with what they have. They are tied to what is available with the fish and the water.

## **Fish Mom**

What Fish Mom's story expresses to readers is that all of the roles that are part of fishing—from the cannery workers, to the galley cook, to the young inexperienced deckhand, the skiffman, to the experienced skipper—hold some relevance. This woman witnessed a broader spectrum in the industry over a longer period of time and therefore has a more calm and holistic view. In comparison to the younger characters, she expresses her opinion about the fishing industry as a more standard lifestyle choice that does not necessarily warrant such excited attention as those who are just entering the industry. She is not exceptionally enthusiastic about what she tells me but she is not discontent about her personal experiences, either. The story just emerges with a more frank demeanor. When Mary started in the fishing industry, prior to marriage, she worked in the Cordova canneries. That was a more typical role for females in the industry in that era (probably 1960's-70's), not actually working on-board an active fishing boat. Cannery experience could include working in the "slime line" or, for a few people, the office and billing department.

One reviewer for this piece (RL) was "Fish Mom's" granddaughter. RL provided feedback that validated and elaborated on what I observed and how I interpreted the interview story. RL's comments included: "[g]reat job setting the scene: tea pot on the stove, the silence, Grandma's age and personality reflected in the way she doesn't even get up to greet you. My grandma is selfless, patient, does not talk about herself. She is definitely understated, frank, critical and opinionated." RL also contributed some general comments on gender and fisheries: "being a mom is an integral part of the family business! You have to be self-sacrificing for family stability. Patience as a mom is very important. Women and men had more defined and separated roles in the past. Women were more likely to contribute as a cannery worker, net



mender or simply stay with the family. Men were more likely to actively crab, fish, or hunt. Today there are more neutral areas.”

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A wet road winds up to an old, rickety but beautifully rain-draped home. The house has been here since the early 70’s and seen generations of children come and grow. Grandchildren are adults now and the great-grandchildren are around. Mary does not get up to open the door, she sees me through window in the entryway and nods (or shrugs, really) when I knock. It is quiet—there’s not a radio on but I do hear the early whisper of a teapot. I can see immediately that Mary is very observant, obviously curious about what I’m doing here and why. She’s a bit skeptical of intentions. She expresses her experiences willingly but in simple and straightforward terms. There is nothing decorative or lively about what she tells me. It’s quite frank. “I have been here for 61 years, I don’t want to go anywhere else. I would not live anywhere else,” she tells me. I ask how she got here, why she came up and she doesn’t even mention where she came from just the blatant expansive region of “southern California.”

Mary’s mother was working in the local canneries before she was—date was probably about 1950. The cannery was appealing—mostly women working there in those days and it was good money. When Mary went back to California she got married and her husband was interested in the north, too. He was an outdoor fellow and wanted the opportunity to see the summer here. Somehow *Mary* convinced *him* to move up, it wasn’t his idea. It doesn’t sound like he was the one who made all the decisions. What were they leaving for? What didn’t California provide? I asked.

“Well, once we got here we knew we would stay,” she explains. “I worked in that cannery for four years and never fished, it wasn’t that common back then for women.” I sense a bit of roll to her eyes and an indifferent shrug.

As it turns out, she tells me later, that her husband did eventually fish for a living, but she didn’t necessarily refer to his living as her living. His life, with his boat wasn’t part of her own reflections. Not only life with a boat season but she also describes the set-net fishery they had out in Main Bay, south of Whittier, halfway to Chenega near Knight Island. “We took the whole family out there and stayed all summer—we had a cabin. Sometimes it was better to go out there than the flats.”

“Before all the kids, cannery work was good. I worked in clams and I worked in fish, making boxes and casing them. Just about all the women in town worked in the cannery. We got coffee time—“mug-up,” they called it. I worked in the Western Parks, American Processors Association—just down there on the docks. My mother worked out in the New England cannery—that’s where Orca Lodge is now. They used to have to come to town by boat but the road’s in now. It used to belong to the Chugach Indians—they called it Chugach for a while. Back in those days a steamer would come to the dock and pick up the cases and take them south.”

She’s wistful. “You know, now they just freeze it instead of can it. Could probably handle a lot more fish in the summer time if they just canned it. All that cannery equipment is gone—but if anyone had those canning lines they could still process more fish when they got bogged down.” So completely practical again. She doesn’t mention, probably doesn’t even consider what the newer market demands—fresh fish or fresh frozen Copper River red salmon.

“This place is appealing. I raised five children here and now I have grandchildren. My family likes it.” She didn’t necessarily mention anything about the town—the quiet, small nature of the town has to be functional, satisfactory but the bigger picture of the mountains and water beyond the town are what seem to draw people in. The town is functional—barely more than that, but what more does it need? It has what it needs and a resident must be able to accept that for what it is or want to accept that for what it is. But, beyond the features of “town”—the world surrounding the small community of Cordova is vast and full. Just not full of “city” or “urban” features.

Mary’s presence seems very settled; she casually mentions the beautiful mountains, the lake behind the school. “You know, it’s mostly just a small, quiet town,” she says. “We’re isolated, we can’t drive out of here. The ferry is hard to deal with sometimes. So, Cordova cares about neighbors. We look after our neighbors, we look after our family—I’ve lived in this house since 1950. What a lot of snow we’ve seen! But, my grandson comes to shovel the roof for me and if he can’t he has friend come.”

Mary says she doesn’t have much of an opinion about what it was like to live here in the 50’s and 60’s. “Oh, my husband could give you some good stories—I was too busy raising kids! My husband was outside trapping, hunting, fishing. He had a trap line and drove out the highway as far as he could. He was also a fur buyer; we bought and sold furs and I made seal-skin parkas!”

“So, you did help him. You did have important Alaska skills, too and you helped him out with his business,” I said.

“Yeah, but then they passed the marine mammal law and I couldn’t work with seals. My husband bought them from the hunters—a lot of them sold over the pole to Norway. They had a good method for tanning them and he sold most of his hides raw.

“When I did fish, I was a fair-weather sailor. I only went when the weather was good. All our boys started fishing. Dad got boats for the boys when they were all pretty young—probably 12 or 13. Grandkids started about that age, too. They used to just have open skiffs and pull the gear by hand. Equipment is easier now. They just ran those skiffs from here with an out-board. Dad wasn’t too far away—he wouldn’t leave them. Back then, you went out on Monday and fished until Friday. They didn’t run in and out all the time like they do now.”

Mary shrugs casually and explains good years and bad years. “You just gotta deal with it, fishing is always like that,” she says. “You never know exactly what the year is going to be like. Isn’t that how it is everywhere? It is what it is. If you want to fish you can’t complain about the differences from one year to the next. If it’s not a great year, you work in the winter. If it is, you don’t.”

True, fishermen have to be willing to take risks; you have to expect some uncertainty. There are all kinds of factors that determine how fish are going to make it through any given year. As a fisherman, you have to accept that. Different management, different technology, different regulations all play a role but in the end, humans can’t control the fish.

Time still passes, children grow and the decks turn over, change shape—some people like their boats too big and some are happy with the confined space of contraction.

## Coffee Talk

I refer to interviewees in this piece as I1 and I2. Recording began mid-sentence because the two men were close acquaintances and compelled to speak before I could get a chance to create a more formal start. This portrait is presented as a script for a play in attempt to demonstrate the pace with which the speakers interacted more in dialogue with themselves rather than with questions I had. I wanted to differentiate between which of the two was speaking and this was composed as a piece with the intention to present with two performers in a FisherPoet performance style setting.

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I1: ...Well, during the Reagan years and stuff they kind of tied capital construction to everything. It was such a blatant tax loophole. Reagan got so pissed off, he had this whole maritime law that he wanted to set in stone like the constitution but he didn't change it or eliminate it. He got so pissed off he moved the capital construction headquarters out of Washington over to Maryland. Laughs. Yeah, I was dealing with him and stuff. That's what I used to use—capital construction.

I2: Any capital construction fund, you have to...

I1: You have to document your vessel.

I2: Well, pretty much any vessel has to be documented. I looked at the mathematical formula they had and I did it. And, according to the mathematical formula I have an 18 gross ton and a 15 net ton. And, I'm like, no way! Not even close. I'm looking at that going, "No!"

I1: It depends on what you say—what's engine space, what's the voids and all that stuff.

I2: What I should have done was done the fish hold and that was it. You know!

I1: That's another hard case, law that we have to deal with! The Jones Act. It's totally asinine. You can't take a vessel from another town! What's the difference? It's limited entry. There's only a certain number of vessels allowed, so what if it's from...

I2: Well, I think it's protecting the boat builders of America.

I1: Well, it's shipping laws, too.

I2: Right. It's kind of tough to ask free trade when you have those kind of rules in place. Governments can do business among governments but the people of the citizenry cannot do business with the citizenry of other countries. That's ridiculous.

I1: Yeah! So, what kind of questions were you going to ask?

E: The first one is, where is home for you? I like to get a sense of this from the fisherman's perspective—if people are spending more than three or four months a year at sea.

I1: Home from your heart or home from just where you live?

E: It's up to you!

I2: I don't know—it's tough! The fishing season is from May 15, and I plan on living on my boat until the end of August. I guess this is pretty much my home for now. It's tough on the family life or even considering having a family life. You like to think Cordova in the winter

months but Cordova can be so darn desolate and depressing that you really can't wait for another fishing season to get back out of here!

I1: We're the modern day gypsies!

I2: Exactly!

I1: We're hunter-gatherers. We have to move to where the resource is.

I2: Modern day nomads is what we are.

E: Are there other fisheries that you participate in?

I2: This is the only one I participate in, for now. It keeps me occupied enough and there's enough work in it. I do plan on getting into salmon seining in a couple years—I have to kind of buy into this one. If were smart, I'd diversify and get one that doesn't conflict with this season here. But, that would require me to move out of the state in the winter months and maybe go down to Washington or Oregon. But, I like Alaska. This is where I want to stay.

E: If you had a seiner, wouldn't you be able to seine when the seine openings were something to do and do this when...

I2: That's what I mean. It's a sacrifice, a trade-off you're going to have. Do the salmon seining and you have to put the gill-net operation on the beach. That gives you an opportunity—if a person were to start having a family life—you could take the family out and have that together time. Because, with the gill-netting, it's a lonely time out there! It's tough to pretty much say

goodbye to the girl friend and say, “be back in a couple months and hopefully you’ll still love me!” It’s difficult. It’s really difficult.

I1: It’s a lot more exciting going 30 knots than six!

I2: Yeah!

I1: You don’t have to look at the same rock day after day, week after week. Sleep with a bunch of old grungy, sleepy people. Just take a shower and...

I2: That’s why I want a state room in my boat! I’m going to make a two story. I’m going to live in the top and they can all stay in the bottom! I’ll just come down for food once in awhile.

I1: What’s the glory in seining anymore? Tell me that?

I2: Yeah! It’s a job, though.

I1: Wait in lines to just be a sharecropper? Your allegiance to the cannery is more solidified now than it’s ever been. They say where you catch ‘em, when you catch ‘em, how much you catch! (I2 is in the background agreeing—“yep, yep”) Ten days and then they’ll give you a little payment at the end of the season.

I2: That’s what we love about gill-netting...but what’s scary is going for volume anymore, it’s kind of important to have some allegiance. I mean a lot of them, they’ll allow guys to fish for multiple markets if you can put in the volume yourself and know how to play the game. Still, over there, they kind of put you over the barrel.

E: You mean cannery allegiance? Is that what you’re saying?



I1: Gill-netting or seining?

I2: Gill-netting across the Sound there...I mean, you know.

I1: Oh, yeah. You have to tie yourself to it.

I2: You have to tie yourself to a processor if you want to go over there and stay over there. Here, which is nice, you can just see who's paying the most and go to whoever. It gives that opportunity for competition because it's limited supply.

E: So, what about you (directed at I1)? What other fisheries have you participated in? It sounds like you've been at it for awhile...your whole life?

I1: Yeah. Since I was five.

E: Where are you from originally?

I1: Kodiak. Born and raised in Kodiak. A quarter Aleut. My family fished, my grandfather and his father.

E: In all fisheries? Or salmon mostly?

I1: No, like King crab and shrimp—drug for shrimp. And halibut. All of the multitudes of whatever was over there.

E: And how did you end up at this one?

I1: I actually came up here, I was teaching skiing in the winter. I went to college in Eastern Oregon. And, another ski instructor was a crew member for TF up here—he said, “come on up here and ski Mount Eyak!” That’s the original chairlift for Sun Valley up here.

E: Am I looking at it?

I1: Yeah, up at the top of the hill up there.

I1: So, I said, “Alright!” I was on my way to Kodiak and I’ll just stop here and ski Mount Eyak and then head over to Kodiak. So, I came here and the boat that we went out on—they closed the hill the day we got here. I went out on TF’s boat. We were tendering herring and we sank the boat. We hit a rock and the boat sank. We spent a month here helping Tom rebuild his boat before I went to Kodiak. I just saw the fishery and how neat it was here and thought, well, I’ll buy in here! And, I’ve been here ever since!

E: How would you describe the fishery to someone who’s never experienced it? What’s it’s like out there? What does it look like?

I1: Compared to something that everybody else knows about?

E: No. I’m literally asking you right now. I don’t know what it looks like out there.

I1: A World War II dogfight. Laughs. Makes engine noises.

I2: Yeah, it can be pretty wild out there. That last opener—that was something else! It was charging out...we were flying all over the place trying to find a fish. Crowding among other people. You’d see that person catching fish...

I1: Whales are swimming all over the place!

I2: Yeah, exactly! The whales! They're the big submarines. That's right. Well, fortunately none of those were caught. It's definitely changed a lot. Anymore, it used to be a nice inside fishery—nice and casual and people would have their traditional spots and you'd allow for the older time veterans to have their spot and you'd give them courtesy and let them have their spot. But, anymore, it's an ocean fishery—you go out there and you chase the fish down, you target them and hope to goodness you can get your share of them! It was quite the site when I was going up waiting my turn to get to the tender. There were eight-10 boats ahead of me. The next thing you know, I look out over by Eagle Island, there must have been 30-40 boats barreling in over the bar, there. It was quite the site. That's when you need the fishery to get started because people are just hungry. They're aggressive. They're uglier to the very end. People are trying to get rid of their fish!

I1: But, if you think this is bad—go up to Bristol Bay. There are 1800 permits up there.

I2: Yeah. There are a lot of boats there.

I1: It's nuts up there.

I2: Yeah, but for someone who's never been out there, that's what you're trying to get out of this question. Well, there are lots of sand bars. You have a big list, a long row of sand bars...you can see the mountains up in the background and it's very serene. You look out to the east...

E: Serene? With the exception of the WWII dog fight?

I2: Exactly. When things are settled down, it's very peaceful out there. You're drifting on along and can see the breakers behind you busting on the sand bars and it gets shallower. You come up to the east and can see Kayak Island and if you're even far enough out, you can see Cape St. Elias. It's beautiful. It really is peaceful.

I1: The eye of the hurricane.

E: When it opens—it opens from about seven to seven, right?

I2: Right. That last opener was seven to seven.

E: Is that pretty normal for now?

I2: Yeah, that will be pretty normal for now.

I1: Until they get the escapement.

I2: Right.

E: So, are people literally counting down before seven so it opens at the exact time? When it opens at seven am, everybody sets?

I1: Yeah, your buoys are ready to go.

I2: There are a few lazy people who are asleep...but they oversleep. But, anyhow, that's based on management in the regulation books. It says that the Copper River district will open either at 7 am in the morning or 7 pm at night. But, they've pretty much done away with the night openers for enforcement purposes. So, it mostly starts at 7 am in the morning. At the beginning

of the season we're doing 12 hour openers—they try to have two a week but there are times where we might get whittled down to one a week when the run is really slow. This year (2011) given the run prediction—they'll allow us to harvest common property—we'll probably definitely be having two 12 hour openers a week and maybe in a couple weeks, maybe 24, 48 even 72 hour weeks! In the Sound, nothing will start until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month. They'll open up the Sound—the entire Sound. They'll probably just give us an 84-60 hour period a week! Those openers start at 8 in the morning.

I1: Those aren't wild.

I2: Those are hatchery fish.

I1: The terminal fishery.

E: So, who fishes in the Copper River? What are the most significant details you can think of regarding fleet identity? Things like personality, social features, maybe commonalities, maybe differences...how would you describe this group of permit holders?

I1: The history—everybody buddied up—that's the biggest draw to this! Coming back, it's fun, listening to everybody's stories from the winter. You've got people from all over the United States, all over the world who come here! What's-his-name is from Chile! There are people from everywhere who come here. There's no real distinct group.

I2: It's a very diverse fishery on an ethnic spread. You have your Russians, you have the Chileans, the Mexicans, the Croatians, European Anglo-Saxons, Filipinos are getting into this now! Even Thai! There's a Thai family getting into the fishery now. It's amazing. How

everyone can come together and really do the best, the common purpose and that's to maintain our livelihood and be able to have the opportunities to fish! I mean, sure, a hundred years ago, it might have been predominantly Native American and white Anglo-Saxon but as time progresses you get more people drawn to it. It's a really neat cultural diversification that has evolved over time.

Il: Laughs... (there is *discussion*, but I can't determine in recording what is being said) ...times have changed!

### Raise the Bar

This portrait represents a younger generation of fishermen. It is based on interviews with men (approximately age 25-35) who grew up in Cordova and always knew they wanted to fish. They never expected anything else. They never *looked* for anything else! There is a bit of conceit in the tone of voice—very proud of their gear, their long term experience. I hear some distinctly smug judgment: “some guys just can’t figure out how to make a living this way—I don’t know why they’d do it. They can’t figure it out! But, then there’s us. I know I could never do anything else! I never have. I’ve never had a job where I was paid by the hour. I honestly don’t think I could handle it. If this wasn’t around? If I couldn’t fish? I don’t know what I’d do. I gotta have it, you know?”

Do I know? I think I do. As one participant expressed, they have never really known anything else or been anywhere else; possibly not even beyond the boundaries of Alaska. I consider reminding them: “Don’t forget to thank your Dad. You guys have it easy. You’ve never tried to do anything else.” But, I don’t prod this particular interviewee—I keep that to myself. In review, I believe that particular opinion, what I consider reminding them, is what one of my evaluators was bothered by. This reviewer expressed to me that she started fishing with her spouse in her early twenties so she was a similar age as these individuals. But, she and her husband came into the industry as outsiders, from a different community, and this made it difficult, they weren’t necessarily treated as kindly as the local fleet. It was not easy for her to get started in the industry.

I compiled interviews to read as a solo speaker rather than multiple voices. However, it does remind me of one particular event where two fishermen and I sat on the deck of a boat in the harbor. It is early summer, the season had already been open for a few days. Bustle, final

preparation and eager commotion is everywhere—every single person who passes the boat gives a little chin shift in our direction.

In review, another comment regarding this piece suggests the tone as “rambling.” That is a result of the setting and context of the discussion. It took place during a busy and brief few moments at the very beginning of the season when I was able to catch the attention and commentary of these young men simply because I was in the Cordova harbor at the right time.

I received varied reflections about this piece. One woman suggested, “I agree, CDV fishermen do feel proud (entitled?) of their experience and can’t imagine having a real job.” In opposition, one man provided this feedback: “I am a young fisherman who grew up here (Cordova), started fishing 10 years ago when I was 18 and am still fishing the same single engine boat built in the 1980s that I started with. So, that being said, I can’t help but be bummed about the tone of the article (although it is certainly an attitude I have heard from young fishermen who grew up here, just not how others interpret work).”

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Where folks are comfortable fishing includes knowledge, experience and, sometimes, a hint of intimidation; it could be very alarming fishing on the beach where you have an ocean swell and breakers coming in, or on the bars where it goes out to breaking waves. Some people use that to their advantage because they are comfortable and they know how to work their equipment—it’s harder work and a little more dangerous (and also a little more fun) but it can also really pay off. You have a portion of the fleet that can do that and then a portion of the fleet that will only fish in deeper water where you never have to worry about snags, never have to worry about going dry and it’s a lot easier on your gear.



The group that fishes the inside waters when it's open and the bars are more likely to be local Cordova residents, we've grown up with this! Our boats are twin engine 800 horsepower; they're big and aluminum and can handle heavy weather. In the earlier years, they fished in an open water skiff and it was entirely an inside the barrier islands fishery and when the tide was running hard, people just anchored up. People would fish at the changes of tides—a little bit on the flood and a little bit on the ebb, mainly just the change of tides.

Now, we fish constantly. So, in general, the fleet has become more efficient. Our nets are better; our boats are better. In the 80's is when people started getting jet boats. That's when the changes really started. When my dad started fishing, right around 1970, he started in an open skiff without a cabin and a kicker. That was pretty common. Then people started getting dog house cabins on their boats. That's what they called them. Then people started building aluminum jet boats and nicer fiberglass jet boats. They were in the 24 to 26 foot range and eventually got up to 29 feet and then in the 90's is when people first started building 32 foot, more similar to the Bristol Bay bow-pickers, and that kind of evolved into this one (the boat) where we're standing.

There aren't really size limits. You can fish your seine boat out there if you want. A couple people do that here and there. But, there's a lot of tide pull and it takes a lot of time to get out and a lot of time to get back. So having a boat that can plane helps a lot. So, something fast. Fast is good. Fast is necessary.

Way back in the day, even before my dad's time the boats would still leave from town but they'd stay out there much longer, it wasn't running back and forth like now. Families would go out and just stay at Castle Island, for instance. Or Kopenhini. They would set up camp all summer long. People would have certain sets that got labeled to their family name and nobody

else would ever even think to mess with them. Different people had different spots. They'd just *be* there. Nobody messed with that. That's all changed now.

The biggest feature of this fleet is that we're self-employed, business owners, single—I mean, it's a one man thing. We fish solo. It's not like other fishing boats, like seine fisheries and long-lining. Then, you have a crew and you're dealing with people. I prefer to do it by myself. I think that changes the attitude of the fishery and what's going on and how people act and do different things. You can be a pretty weird person and be on your own. It's a hodge-podge of people. You got a lotta individualists. Everybody has their own ways—sometimes it makes it hard to do group work. But, that's also what makes it cool. We're proud to be able to work on our own.

### **Making a Set**

Each time you put your net out, you call it a set. The number of sets in a day is really variable—right now we get 12 hour openers and I don't think I left my net for more than 20 minutes until like two hours into it. I was just guessing and checking because we only have 12 hours and you're trying to find the fish. You gotta find 'em before you catch 'em. I work with a radio group of fishermen, we spread out at first so we're finding exactly where the best and the most fish are and maybe there are a couple areas that are producing fish but based on where they are you might also be able to guess where they'll be on the next tide. So, the first couple hours it was lots of sets and then by the end I was leaving the net for an hour and a half at a time because I was in the fish. They were hitting my net.

You don't want to leave the net too much longer than that because the fish will start dying in the net. When you're really in the fish, a lot of times, you might pick half and then set it back out. Then, pick the other half and set it back out. You are supposed to always have one end

attached to the boat except for if you're swapping ends or doing things like that. You're not supposed to leave your net unattended, but sometimes you can just switch ends really fast. I think it's just a law, maybe.

It's pretty competitive in the fishery. There are about 540 permits and it's a full access fishery—that means nearly every single one is being used. There are people out there that aren't real competitive and just go and do their thing and maybe not talk to any other people and they're having a good time. But, there is a good portion—I'd just be guessing if I said a number—but I would say a couple hundred of the fishermen, maybe three or even four hundred of the fishermen who are very, very competitive. They have their own distinct groups that they work with. We know the different groups out there—what boats are in each group. That's one thing about my radio group—we don't talk about who's in it, so people know some of our boats but nobody outside of our group could probably name all the boats in the group. That plays to our advantage, quite a bit. Most groups are about five or six boats. Most people in the fleet do recognize each other and sometimes that makes it hard to cork somebody—but, you gotta do what you gotta do, you know?

### **Changes/ Transitions**

There have been some really big changes in Prince William Sound in the past few decades. The 1964 earthquake dropped the water level by six feet. So, that changed the geology—before you could run across the top of the barrier islands at a much earlier tide than you can now and after that...in 1980 or 81, there were no reds out there that year for whatever reason. And, so they actually made it so you had to fish king gear—the mesh size was bigger so the reds would swim through. That was kind of an interesting year and I've never heard of that again. Then, of course, there was the 1989 oil spill. I'm not the perfect person to tell you about

the Copper River for the oil spill because of my age but I don't think the oil spill had a whole lot of extended effect out there, if any—maybe in marketing and that was it. If anything it showed us we better know what to do if that happens again.

I'm not that old, you know? When I was in high school we went through a few years that I remember people calling the “salmon crisis”—we just weren't getting the right prices for the work. Prices were really low. All my buddies in those years could not wait to stop eating salmon. That's all we had and we did not want it! It was cheap and those were kinda grim years in the early 90's. Eventually I started to like salmon again; now I eat fish 3-4 times/ week.

The good thing about that time was that the permit prices were low—I got my own gear when I was 14 and then you could do \$50 grand for a boat and permit, now it's more like \$200,000.

## **The Copper**

The Copper River is the place for me— it's not just the fishing—and this goes back to the area being special. These fish—some people might say it's just marketing on the Copper River—but these are the best salmon in the world! Especially right now, in the first couple weeks, there is nothing better. People say, “oh, yeah, whatever.” Then, they have our fish frozen—and say it is the best salmon they ever had! But, having fresh salmon—like tonight—we'll have king salmon. King is a totally different thing compared to any other salmon. That's really neat. It also goes beyond the fishing as well—the subsistence aspect of it, well, I call it subsistence—we bring in personal use fish and we do batches in the smoke house and give it away as gifts and have it to eat all winter. It's a pretty special thing. I'd never give that up

And, I think there is a really good community here in Cordova. Especially in the winter time—when all this summer chaos straightens out. The people from the summer time leave. The community stands together—like if somebody gets hurt or if some bad thing

happens—there are potlucks and people raise money and people donate things to help them out. When you walk around you can wave to anybody—it's not necessarily your friend, but you know who it is.

I'd say it's a really close community, in my opinion. It's a beautiful, rainy place with Copper River salmon. What else would you want?

## Old Salt

This piece demonstrates the personal transitions that this particular individual recalls in commentary expressed to him from his parents, who arrived in the Cordova area in the early 1900's, as well as what he experienced. The latter includes changes to the fisheries and hunting opportunities. Namely, he refers to the 1964 earthquake and how that changed the commercial clam opportunities as a result of the seabed uplift. He also discusses when he started fishing independently--he was just 13 years old. It would be quite unlikely that he would be operating a vessel at that age and in this era. Though, in consideration of the general demeanor and personality of this individual, this may have been an exaggeration. The volume of dialogue available for this portrait was larger than most others. Again, I would like to suggest the position of "insider/outsider." When this individual spoke with me, he realized my personal history 1) with the Prince William Sound seine industry and 2) as a resident of the Kenai Peninsula where most of the Russian Old Believer permit holders live, near Homer. I believe those two personal details are what influenced commentary. This "portrait" tells some particularly biased commentary regarding behavior of the Old Believers on the fishing grounds. Those two emic/insider details are what prevailed in this character's clear prejudices to emerge in a naturally flowing conversation.

One comment that I find exceptionally disrespectful (and not just in the case of this interviewee, though he was very upfront with it) that is used frequently is to refer to the Russian Old Believers as "Russians." Nearly three pages of the transcript from this discussion read as somewhat of a rant regarding the behavior and tactics of these members of the fleet. I do not think this individual would have been as open with me about his opinion without these two obvious dimensions of my situation (an insider to commercial fishing in the region and from

Homer). Similarly, at the end of the piece the speaker began another outburst related to the up-river regulation of accessibility (both for sport and subsistence use) and how that potentially negatively impacts the commercial fishermen. This is an individual with a strong point of view who is clearly unconcerned about sharing it with someone he perceives as sympathetic to his commentary. It is included here because he reflects an attitude shared by some members of the fleet. However, it is important to note that though this bias may be evident in some conversations, it is not the sole opinion of the fleet as a whole.

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My Grandpa, mom's dad I mean, came here in the early 1900's. He came up and helped build that Crystal Falls Cannery down on Eyak River. He tendered for them. That's where Grandpa and Dad met, on the river. It's about ten miles from here and then down the Eyak River and then down the hillside you'll find over there.

Dad came when he was 12 and he came up with just his mom—there were five kids. Do you want to hear that story? He started fishing and trapping and working odd jobs and whatever he could do here as soon as he got out of school—during high school I think he helped my Grandma. She's still alive and lives in Cordova today at 93.

We had a big family here—especially on my mom's side. I think Grandpa got out of the fishery—probably in the late 60's. He started to be a plumber—he had to move the girls to town for school and stuff. You know, they used to dig clams here before the earthquake and fished up at the grass banks which we don't do anymore.

The earthquake lowered the water and the sand came up and most of the clams died. All the fish sites moved. We fish further out now; we don't fish at the grass banks at all. Lots of things

have changed since the earthquake. The water dropped so a lot of the streams in Prince William Sound and the area, they dropped and the fish couldn't get into them. That's why we have hatcheries today. In the early 70's, we had folks decide to build hatcheries to raise fish—to help bring economic value to the region. To all Prince William Sound. We run a hatchery up on the Copper River, also. I started seining with my dad when I was ten years old—that was in 1970.

I used to go out on the flats—they'd fly me out in a little plane and I'd go out and I'd go fish with him right there, at times. Then, duck hunt, too. When I was younger—before the earthquake—we could run the boat right up into the lake from the grounds. That was kinda neat. Then, I started gill-netting when I was 11. I went over into the Sound with an open skiff for six weeks. That's how I started fishing—gill-netting all by myself. I've never fished salmon anywhere else in the state—I didn't need to. But, I herring seined in Togiak and a few other spots. I spotted herring in Sitka, for a little while. I flew with my cousin.

I never fished any crab or Pollock or anything like that because I got married early and I didn't want to go out west. I didn't think it was right to do. But, I crabbed with my dad in the bay here for Dungeness and Tanners were around the corner and out in the Sound for King crab when I was in high school. And then, let me see, it wasn't limited entry—so when limited entry came on, I think that was 72 or 73, I didn't qualify by one year. So, my uncle Charlie happened to break his hip and I bought his permit and boat when I was 13. For 5,000 bucks! What a laugh! That's how I started gill-netting. I gill-netted a year before that, I believe, on the flats. Then, the next year I had to buy my permit. And, then seined with my dad until I was out of high school. I still have that permit, but no boat to go with it!

But now? The Copper River fishery is beautiful! Absolutely gorgeous. It's always changing. The amount of snow that's on the mountain or how high the river is. It's always



changing! The entry every year is different—the bars change, the water comes out of one area versus another more. The fish go here or there. It's always glowing or it's just always changing. It's not like the Sound where you have a hatchery and the fish are just going there. They could enter the Copper River from the east, from the west. It just depends on tides, currents, wind...all that stuff. So, it's always changing and you're always busy. You're always thinking, "Where are they? Where are they entering? Where we gonna find this today?"

Compared to seining you have to be pretty alert to what's going on around you for safety reasons. I'll give you an example, if you have a big swell and then you have a wind chop, you get in really big trouble and if it's on the ebb and you need to get inside—you're not going to get inside if the swell is too big. You won't get inside the Barrier Islands. The bars will close and there will just be big breakers out there. You won't get in! You always have to be aware of the weather. My concern for the new people coming in is that they might not be afraid or see the things I've seen over the past 40 years. Their equipment might not be as good or up to date—there's always a maintenance schedule that's huge. So, there are so many variables.

But seining can be dangerous, too. Just not so much in the location, the water--it's all the equipment. The deck winches, the hydraulics, there are more people on deck who you have to be concerned about. More duties to be performed—most gill-netters usually just do it by themselves. One person. So, you're not really worried about somebody else. You're always, whatever you do, just depending on yourself to do it instead of somebody else to maybe help you.

If something happened on the flats, most likely you could find someone to help, you know, especially now we have cell phones and we have radios. I'm not in a radio group, but my son is.

There are people out there I keep in touch with and they're friends I could always call and they would come help if I needed it. Or, I could just call the Coast Guard. Depends on the situation.

Most of the time, you're in sight of other boats. There are a few rare occasions during the year where if the fleet is all spread out there might not be another boat visible. When you're pretty much by yourself or when there just a few other boats around—the stress is gone, you don't have to fight, you don't have to try and work...there's more room, there is more opportunity to maybe catch fish. Somebody's not always corking in front of you.

There was an accident on Monday. A guy whose through-hole fitting cracked and he couldn't really stop the leak and he had a lot of water on-board his boat coming in through the fitting he had. They dropped pumps on him and stuff. I didn't hear how he ended up—I don't think he died because I would have heard that. I think they got the water pumped and people got to him and helped him. Think it was someone pretty new. It was an older man, who has only been fishing for five years or so. It wasn't one of the young kids.

You know, I heard some report for the state of Alaska saying the average fisherman was 49 years old. Here in Cordova, because we've had some good years with our Copper River fish, you get more people coming up and seeing the fishery and they think, "oh, I want be a gill-netter!"

Well, we actually get paid for our fish these days—isn't always like that. We're getting more than 50 cents a pound and pinks are up to 40 cents a pound, where they should have been a long time ago. So, people are starting to make some money again. That's bringing younger people into Cordova—they're starting to buy permits. The opportunity is good again. After the oil spill, everything went flat. It was on the rise—everything was on the rise—and then the oil spill happened. We were getting 70 cents for our pinks and it dropped to 30 cents. We went all the

way down to 3 cents a pound for our pinks—for silvers we were getting 35 cents one of those years! I mean just seven or eight years ago. So, now we're up to a \$1 or \$1.30-40! People like wild salmon.

When it went down it was manipulation from the processors. It was before, like in 88 and 89, the salmon fishery in Alaska worth about a billion dollars to the fishermen back then. Today, it's only worth 600 million! It's just now getting back to where it was before that—if you see actual damages from the Exxon spill, they didn't want it to have actual damages—they rolled, and we still got screwed, anyway. They wanted to drop the price down so the value wasn't there anymore. It affected Kodiak, Cook Inlet, it affected the whole state! So, all that stuff—they paid off the canneries. The canneries got paid off, but they found that after the court case—or state court or whatever it was here. But, we just got screwed. So, we're just getting back to where we used to be—where we're actually getting paid for what we do. This is what we do.

With prices on the rise for permits, boats, things like that—it is hard for younger people to get in. They either get family backing or if they've been in the fishery they can get good state loans right now, I think it's 3 or 4% and if they make their first payment it drops a percentage. So, right now, there's a good program. Say, if had a crewman for two years and he was making pretty good money and he knew the fishery, I think he could go to the state and get a loan, like my son did.

My son got a loan through the state—he made a payment and it dropped down 1%. I think there are some good programs out there to get younger people into it and I think they get a little help...my son's been in it since he was five! He's still got payments with his seine boat, with different things in another direction. He's got gill-netter payments, and stuff. But, he's trying to try to do it by himself, the way I had to do it. You know? I think that there are some good loan

programs and they're making pretty good crew shares. Once these younger kids are making crew shares—I know one young man he bought a gill-net permit at 115—that permit is now 180! But, he leased it out, he went seining. He made huge money and he's making his payments on his permit. He doesn't have a boat to gill-net on yet but he's seining and making payments—and you have to do it in stages. He doesn't want to bite off more than he can chew. He's just graduating this year, high school. It's kinda neat.

He's getting a little help from his dad in some ways, probably. I'll back him up. I'd probably help my son if something happened and he was pretty poor for a few years—I'd help him get through—I want to think that everything will be pretty good! It looks good—the opportunity looks good for the next five years.

Most of the men in our fishery have been in it quite awhile. There's not a lot of new—the only people getting out are the older people getting ready to retire. And, the only new are the Russians—when I first started we used to have like 30 Russian people fishing. I'm talking about 30 years ago. We had probably 30 maybe 35 Russians, total. Well, all those folks have grown up—they're older than me—they had kids and they're buying their kids permits or whatever. So, in the last 5 years that we're having 50 or 60 of these people—you have 160. So, there's 1/3 of the fleet is Russian people and most of them are young.

It affects us because they've got these loud boats and they really don't care if they set and cork you—set in front of you. That changes the fishery. You could be sitting with a half a mile on each side of you and right before the opener over in the Sound, they'll go in and one will set on each side of you and there are so many now, they'll just gang up on you! I've watched from out fishing off-shore to watching a guy fishing and some Russian is fishing outside of him. He calls his buddies and pretty soon there are seven people around that one guy! And, he has to

leave, because they've just taken control of the whole spot. And, so, that's really frustrating. They go—like if you're fishing—somebody might watch you pick up and say, “oh, that guy is getting fishy!” He tells his radio groups that might have 20 or 30 people in them—then they know that the guy is catching fish, he's picking great! So 20 or 30 minutes, everyone is around you.

“Picking great” just means he's picking a lot. He might get a little clatter of 15 or 20 and so if somebody sees that they're telling their friend, “hey! This guy's got some fish over here!” If that happens to me, I just leave. I just leave. I do not want any part of that. That's not how I was taught to fish. I'm not in a group. I used to be and it's too much stress. I finally quit smoking, 2 ½ years ago, so I'm in a different mode. I don't want that in my life and if I'm in a group there are all these expectations, you gotta be on the radio. I just turn my radio off. It's not important. I just want to go out and fish. I just find the fish myself and if I don't get as much as everyone else, that's fine. I did it myself. I didn't have someone else tell me where the fish are. That's how it's changing. Most of the people are pretty good. I would say 50% of the gill-net fleet come from the old school so they're not quite as bad. They won't just cork you like a Russian will. Then, there are a lot of new guys that don't—the butts—just slap it right to him, just set cork to cork or whatever—just because he's getting fish. But, probably 60% of the fleet, the gillnet fleet, is pretty good. They give you a little bit of room—courteous a little bit. They're courteous. You do see a change with the Russians. The older Russians are great—they wouldn't cork me—I know they wouldn't. But, the younger people—with the new boats? Those little kids that are 16 years old, 17, 18, 20—they don't care! They just slap it to you, all around you until you don't even get a fish anymore! You always have to move—if they come and do that, I

just move. I just go somewhere else, try to find them somewhere else and hope people leave me alone. You know?

I'll interact with the older ones, with the young ones, I don't. I won't do it. I had a friend last year who got really mad at a Russian because they don't pay attention. They don't follow the rules. It's like there are no rules. They just do what they want. They get out of line, they'll sleep over. If there's a line—they'll go to sleep—and then they'll try to get in line when the fishing is good.

You just have to be awake for your turn. If you sleep through it and then think, "oh, it was my turn!" And then try to go get in line—that's wrong. You missed your turn. You can't do that. They don't understand that. Then it's a big fight and everybody argues. They argue and fight right on the boat. You see people yelling at them and banging boats and stuff. People try to whack them with their buoy hooks and throw things at them.

The boats are 70% or 60% metal these days. The rest of are fiberglass. They used to all be fiberglass. I had the 7<sup>th</sup> aluminum boat in the fleet in 1986. But things are changing now, bigger boats handle more weather. We have to fish outside now, so the boat standards are changing. Also in the Sound, we have our hatcheries that are producing two-three million chums. The more you can carry is a big thing. And, it's more comfortable to be on a bigger boat. I was over there (*in the region of the Sound beyond the Copper River district where the pink salmon fishing occurs*) 19 days straight, so, it's a little nicer to stay there on a bigger boat.

I don't like fishing over in the rest of the Sound. I'd rather just fish the flats. I guess to explain Prince William Sound we have Main Bay red hatchery and we have a chum hatchery. Then we have Chalmers—which are remote release chums. The price has been coming up. Last year was like 80 cents, so there's money there to be made! So, most of the fleet

is going there. I'd rather just stay in the flats, but if they only give me 12 hours, I can't make a living on the flats. I gotta have more time. So, what they're doing is they're just taking from our user group—who, after the oil spill, we depended on that because the Sound was dead. So, we depended on that for survival. I had 50,000 dollar seasons—and to try to make boat payments of \$50,000 on top of that. I made it out here. I didn't make it in the Sound. So, you go to work and all that.

The people who really like to fish, who aren't in it just for the money, that we're raised here and fish because they love to do it? They fish mostly on the Copper River. The people who are just in it for the money and are trying to make their payments—they go to the Sound. But, like me, I wasn't raised on the Sound. I was seining, so I never got a gill-net over there. So, by the time the gill-netters were fishing over there, I was seining with my dad or seining my own boat. So, I just fished the Copper River, pretty much.

There's only been the last few years out of the five that I fished over in the Sound and I don't care for it. There are too many boats. The Russians are all over there. I'd rather come over here; one year I only went over there for like a week in the Sound and fished and then I came back here and just fished on the Copper River. It's how we're raised. The younger kids, they just go around the hatcheries, when those fish are coming they don't have to move, they don't have to think. I'll give you an example. In the Sound last year, I did a little round-haul, a figure 9 trap set? With about 1/3 of my gear. In five minutes, I had about 260-300 chums just hitting like reds and that was fun. Me, I found this place where the fish were coming out of this place

and circling around, so I made a set from the beach and I told my friend to go like this<sup>12</sup>—he had like 5,000 pounds! I only had 1500 but when he left those fish came back around and came right into my net and then I had 5,000 pounds! So, finding sets like that are fun for me. That’s what fishing is about. It’s not waiting for a hatchery and going “dum, de, dum, de, dum, de” when are they going to come? I’d rather go look for them. I’m going to find them somewhere. I’m going to learn how to trap them. That’s what I think fishing is about! That’s what makes it fun for me. On the Copper, like I said, every year they enter different. In a weak year, they enter in a smaller range. Like, they might only be in a ten mile band. This year, they’re in a 30 mile band. There’s 30 miles of fish. Everybody is doing pretty good.

This year is going to be bigger than last year. Last year we caught 600,000. This year we’ll probably catch over 1.2 million. Maybe more! It could be two or three million! You never know. They don’t know.

You know, I’ve lived here and I’ve lived in the valley. The Mat-Su Valley. People in the valley just don’t understand. You try to explain stuff to them and they’re clueless. Unless you experience something yourself you really don’t know what you’re missing—I found that out myself—if you don’t come and do it, you’ll never really know. It’s really hard to explain that. Cordova is really tight with the people that live here. There are a lot of good people. The fishermen get together. If there’s a fundraiser we always get together. If somebody needs something! There’s a lot of effort in helping in this town. Whether it’s our ball team, our soccer

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<sup>12</sup> At this point in the conversation, the speaker provides a rapid hand motion to indicate what he asked his friend to do to retain the fish near the net. He was speaking in a very excited tone.



team, baseball—any sports for the kids. This community is the best. You won't find any better, anywhere! Anywhere! There is nowhere. We all depend on the Copper River for our livelihood. We all depend on the ocean. If we didn't have our fishery....I don't know, we all depend on the fishery. Hopefully we'll never have a lot of tourism. We don't want no road! We don't want that because that will ruin the Copper River and ruin our fishery. Access. It already is, it's already happening.

Every once in awhile I think about other spots. I hear Petersburg is a pretty good place to live and I've just gone by it. I've been in Ketchikan. But, they get a lot of tourism. Seward gets a lot of tourism in the summertime. But, it's not the same. They depend on some of the ocean, there are some fishermen there, but mostly it's tourism and sport-charter. That kind of thing. Sightseeing. They're not totally dependent on the resource, Mother Nature period. And, we are.

You know, I wouldn't want to be up in Kenai now because of all the users there. They're just wreaking havoc on the commercial fishery that's been there and provided for years. The upper Cook Inlet, the lower, the Kenai River, Homer—there used to be more fishermen there—they fish over here now. A lot of people who live there seine here and gill-net here. I know a few, a couple in my son's group. They're nice people. I think that's why they fish here. Because they get away from that in the summer. All that tourism stuff.

I would never want to live there. Homer is great. In the winter. I've been there. I've worked on my boat there. I mean there are other communities—Seward. Seward is a great community! I love Seward. In the winter. I don't like all the people. I mean, I just don't! So, it would be hard—I would think that Petersburg, I hear that Petersburg is a lot like here. They can depend on the crab, they have halibut and the seining. They're a lot like us. Probably Wrangell, some of the smaller communities. They're probably like us—don't get touched by all the tourism and

that's what makes this place unique. You won't find any place like Cordova. You just won't. You go 50 miles out the road and the scenery has changed completely. You go out to the Million Dollar Bridge and the mountains have changed. What's growing on the mountains has changed, right in Cordova! Just 50 miles away it's completely different. Down to Bering River, it's completely different than it is on this side.

The only up river changes that are bad is the abuse of people throwing away fish. The want and waste. The people who come in here from the states and they can't fish because of regulation. I'm just saying personal use or whatever. People come up here and they'll bring their motorhomes up here and they'll sit and can it. And, once it's processed—you can start again! Then they pay for their whole trip. That's not right. How should somebody, me, I'll be an example, raised here and live here all my life—and yet everybody else is controlling my life! In a sense. There's control. This guy right up here! We just rid of one guy. And now we got a new guy, from up river management and he's saying, "close it, for the up river guys."

Come on, Fish and Game! This is my life! This is how I make my living! This is how I've done it for years. And it's what supports this community. My dollar spent here—helps here, it helps Anchorage. It helps everywhere. Yet, the people up river—they're fishing the garbage! I've got Natives up in the valley, friends of mine, that call me every year, "You want fish out of my freezer? I didn't eat it all. Do you want fish from last year?"

I lived up there for a while, about 15 years after the oil spill, so I know a lot of people. I mean, I like 'em. They're my friends but that salmon waste! God! It's just want-and-waste. When does wanton waste come before need for a community or a livelihood of somebody else? I don't understand it. Yet, we have these hatcheries in the Sound—I'll give you a perfect example—before the oil spill nobody knew about the Sound. We had hatcheries! Now, we got

Anchorage coming down through the tunnel and they catch—they figure at PWSAC<sup>13</sup> they caught  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million fish from us! Ok! So, they're taking  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a million sport fish from us! That we paid for! They don't have to pay for it—they benefit, the state benefits—everybody benefits from PWSAC because we're raising these fish. But, then they shut us down—we can't have these fish over here even though there is a hatchery there. Half the time we don't even get to catch those fish! The escapement isn't there yet—so we miss a whole run. The state won't regulate, the feds won't regulate up river. And catch and release—when you hook and release 40 king salmon in a night—every night? How many are going to die? I see it in the Eyak River. We flew over to moose hunt and there are dead silvers everywhere. From the people who are fishing hook and release! Now, that is want-and-waste. I don't do that. Every fish I catch and bring on board goes to feed somebody. Yeah, there's a lot of bitterness there. We have Board of Fish here and we have three people on the board that are from Fairbanks, 1 from Anchorage, 1 from Bethel and 1 from somebody else. How lopsided is that? You know! Those Fairbanks people, “Oh! We need more fish.” And we give them more fish. We've upped it and upped it. We get more and more up there all the time and they just want more! So, what's going to happen is we're going to have an endangered king salmon here. Copper River king. Guess who's going to pay? Us! Is it my fault? No! We get them up there, they just take too many.

The big problem is up river—and for people that actually need it. I don't care! If you need it to survive and feed your family, that's one thing! But, I don't want you feeding red salmon to a dog! I don't want to hear those Anchorage folks claim they need it—that it's subsistence. That's

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<sup>13</sup> Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation. <https://pwsac.com/>.

not true! Why don't you give them a pink salmon that's not worth as much? It has more Omega-3 in it! Use common sense. We could send up a whole van of pink salmon for a fraction of a cost of what the red is worth. And, it's better food for the dog! Simple things.

You know what's most important to me other than fish? Salmonberry bushes! With the little pink blossoms on them. The little grain inside! We have good nagoon berries here. Big part of me growing up! We have moose. And, lots of deer. For hunting opportunities. We have beautiful mountains. Great duck hunting. The Sound has places in it that I've never been that I'd like to see some day. That are just absolutely gorgeous. I haven't seen them, but I've heard about them. Oh, sunrise and sunsets are beautiful here! There are some real special ones. Loons on the lake. I get to listen to them every morning or in the evening.

It's still wild here, I think. It's still wild and that's why I'm staying.

### **Miss Emily—Delivery Days**

The research time that informed this portrait was intended to be a general participant observation on a tender, the receiving vessel, when boats are delivering fish. What I did not realize until I went back over my notes is that this particular observation occurred in an extended setting that prompted discussion questions that were very direct but casual at the same time. Much of this conversation took place prior to the vessel deliveries so the contextual introduction for this particular portrait is substantially longer than it is in other cases.

Mike, the skipper of the boat was slightly younger than me and both of us have family experience with seine vessels in Prince William Sound. The boat itself, Miss Emily, is a seine vessel. As it turns out (and especially in retrospective consideration), some conversation I had with Mike were more personal and informative than many of the more structured interviews. Dialogue occurred in a natural context--with inherent pauses and lapses. In recollection, my behavior and interaction with the crew demonstrate a general customary awareness of the interactive dynamics of the work environment.

A fishing tender is the vessel that a fishing boat delivers to throughout an open period. In the Copper River drift fishery, tenders are often large seine boats that have a contract with a local processing plant. Seiners suffice for a tender because the large boats, “the limit seiners,” at 58 feet<sup>14</sup> can hold approximately 100,000 pounds of fish. A full drift boat may hold approximately

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<sup>14</sup> For more information related to the meaning of “limit seiners” see Chapter 4: Prince William Sound Salmon, Part II.

2,000 pounds of fish. Depending on the length of the open period, drift boats will likely deliver multiple times.

While waiting for the fishing day to end and the boats to begin delivery, Mike and I had hours to talk casually. In discussion, he explained how a tender contract works. "You confirm a tender contract from a processing company for an established number of days (approximately 100). The contract includes fuel and gas—the vessel begins with tanks full, but anything used during the season is covered by the processor and you end with tanks full. Length of contract are variable—by the end of the Copper Season there don't need to be as many tenders—some of the larger ones, the crab boats, will have an extended contract for the seine fishery. The number of tenders a company hires depends on the company size and how many boats fish for the company," he said.

A tender vessel will announce over the processor's radio station as they arrive in the area open to fishing, if the tender moves they may re-announce their location or express that they are changing sites, where they are located for fishing boats to know who is closest by saying which island marker "Kok Can" or "Grass Can" they are near and how deep they are. Depth is important because water level declines consistently across the sandy bottom and gives a coordinate so that the fishermen can tell who is closest to drop fish to. The tenders are relatively far apart and hard to determine by sight alone. The tenders update their announcements regularly and, if mobile, express which direction they're headed, east or west.

Mike explained, "we don't really rest much during an open fish day. Mostly we wander to separate boats among fleet and then put all the fish on a delivery boat to take it back to town at a set location. We are at Egg Island for this particular trip. The tender has to take deliveries all

day because the boats can't get on step and they sit too low in the water if they have more than 1000 pounds on board. They don't want to drive like that, it's slow.”<sup>15</sup>

One significant contemporary feature is the USCG AIS (Automatic Information System) as a required policy for certain boats (based on size/ length) for the purpose of traffic control—it's not just a boat, it shows the boat name and you can see exactly where it is on your GPS screen. There's some concern over policy change for the seiners—like if they were required to put it on their boat and then other fishermen could see where they're fishing. Sometimes, a lot of times, you don't want guys who aren't in your radio group to know. For the big boats it's required around oil terminals—like in Valdez, Nikiski. It's required for a certain length vessel—maybe about 60 feet, maybe 72 feet. You can “cloak” the radar so your boat doesn't show its name or just have the receiver and the transmitter. It's convenient to be able to look at the GPS screen and see where certain boats are located; like if a drifter is trying to find a tender.

“In the flats, the radio groups are larger than they are in the Sound because boats are more dispersed,” Mike said. “There is no line-up like we see with the seine fleet, you can retrieve more information from the width of the islands and river. And there's no real fish pile up. There are maybe ten or so in a radio group—but it kind of depends. As you get to know who is out here and you know who is in what group: if there's three out of ten, you know they're kind of following each other.”

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<sup>15</sup> This is different from seining where it typically would be considered too time consuming to stop mid-day to deliver fish with concern over how the boat sits in the water. The drift-boat generally moves faster and rides higher in the water than a seine boat.

“The increase in mammals out here is definitely challenging (whales, sea otters, seals, orcas)—they eat a lot out of the net and appear to know that the net is a good harvest location because the fish are stuck. This means that if an orca (they’re especially annoying about this) knows there are nets out, they’ll take bites here and there and if a fish has a bite out of it or it’s missing the head, the fisherman can’t sell it. We do know that halibut and black cod are in decline with the whale population on the rise. The whale population is higher than it has been in the past one hundred years. By Hinchinbrook Island, fifty miles south west of here, Sperm whales are an issue, too. And, the boats set near shore, Humpback’s will strip gear. Humpback’s and the serious herring discussion in Prince William Sound is a big deal, too. A lot of people like to blame the oil spill but the whales don’t help with the population crash either. Sea otters and dungy crab—the sea otters are way up in number,” he said.

“The time for a typical delivery totally depends on the opening. On this opening we had a few early ones but got a little busier around late afternoon and in the evening it was consistent. All the tenders generally chat casually about what’s progressed so far and how the day is looking and where they should stake out—it’s 10:00 AM. The radio discussion is so constant and casual that the boats might as well be sitting around the dock or a bar. There is fairly consistent chatter all day about how things are looking.”

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At 10 am, the first boat of the day comes across on the radio system requesting tender assistance.

*“Miss Emily, Atomic.”*

*“Yeah, I got ya!”*

*“Thought I’d have you pull up and give you some of these while you’re here.”*



*“Alright!”*

The F/V Atomic pulls up, with two men on deck. There is a sign over their door says, “Come in! We’re open.” They hand the permit card off and start unloading a few brailer bags—standard beige NOMAR style—into the Miss Emily fish-hold. Bags are then rinsed out over their low rail immediately. Mike has the scale numbers inside the top-house and yells the numbers out as he pulls them on. Three bags, last one was 628 pounds. “We got one dog!” the skipper reports.

There is a life ring floating in the rip and crew goes to grab it—has the boat name “Tazlina” identifying it. All permit cards have some kind of buoyant keychain or very small buoy on them. Later, Tazlina hands over some smoked black cod, a true luxury, as a thank you for delivering the buoy. The rip is a feature of the water where current is running—it changes by tide and the current of the river outlet. That’s where fish are likely to be, because it makes it easier to run up-river.

One hundred fish at 10 in the morning is not bad and general radio talk continues “...there’s some groundswell but no real chop, calmed down quite a bit and it looks pretty sunny—unlike yesterday which was totally showering.” The third boat, F/V Teeter from Homer, delivers 200 pounds (not really enough fish for a suitable delivery) and takes fuel at 11:45. “To run four miles for just that much fish is not really appropriate, it’s pretty rude and kind of annoying,” Mike frowns.

Mike continues explaining his own family experience, “I am the third generation in my family to live in Cordova. Grandpa worked for TSA all over the state: Bethel, Fairbanks. Grandpa finally provided flight information in the Cordova area and retired here after work in other parts of the state. My dad and two uncles also participated in TSA. My uncle was more involved in fishing than his father who definitely did not encourage me to stay with fishing. Dad suggested I

go to college for engineering or dentistry but I ended up fishing salmon, long-lining cod, crab in the Bering Sea—way out Northwest.”

“Here’s another change: inside closures started about six years ago. Six years ago it would have been more typical for the tender to stay inside and take fish just from in there rather than do an outside loop, we go outside a lot more now. Actually, they don’t fish in there now at all. As for other parts of the Sound? Chalmer’s—that’s all seine now. Ester? Lots of the Copper River boats do go down there but the fleet have to pick dog’s and that’s not nearly as good as the Copper but if Fish and Game close it up here and then you don’t have any choice—well, except the older fleet—the guys that are like 50+, they won’t leave this area. Just the Russians and the younger guys.”

## **Day Two**

The crew comfortably run the hydraulics with their backs facing the delivery station (facing the stern): they are operating the system, very quickly, without looking at it. The first delivery is at 7:30. The buoys along the boat stayed set out all night. There are about 12 buoys on each side of the boat but the delivery boats almost entirely use the starboard side. There are two cleats on the drift boat that the tender crew secure as the small boat approaches from outside steering station on the port side. The first boat delivers four king salmon that they estimate to be about 40 lbs.

The morning is totally clear and mountains are high in the background—just a tiny bit of swell. Kori comes in and throws away his second Mountain Dew can of the morning—“It is so hot out there! It feels good!” Deliveries are very consistent all morning, most of the volume were caught in late sets last night and it’s not really any faster or better fishing than yesterday.

The F/V Cedar Bay pulls up and fellow on board remarks that “the weather is beautiful and I had a good night! I slept! But, you know, I have all damn winter to sleep. And, you can sleep when you die! Anything happening towards town?” Mike responds, “Oh, a pop or so here or there by the Strawberry Can.” When Cedar Bay leaves, Mike makes some comments comparing the fishing here to what he sees in Cook Inlet: “the fishermen are way more professional over here, they know what they’re doing. You meet a lot more guys in Cook Inlet who just think they can fish and get home for television time. They don’t put as much effort in.”

The Miss Emily begins taking deliveries at about 5:00 pm on both sides of the boat. Now, it’s taking about ten minutes to unload a boat, the crew is moving faster. Most boats have about one or two bags ready for final delivery, some more full than others. The fish are supposed to be separated, keeping the dogs apart from the reds. On occasion the fish are mixed together and one person, a Russian Old Believer, delivers a very mixed bag. “I’m annoyed with this because his brother, with same last name, just did the same thing on a recent opening and it’s not appropriate or typical,” Mike says. At 8:00 PM boats are still running into the channel. “Looks like a Militia! Everyone just streaming back!” announces Kori.

Mike finally pulls the anchor on Miss Emily, the front hold is full, and the back hold has quite a few fish in it. His estimate for the boat total is about 35,000 pounds. The boat gets to the dock about 10:30 PM and the crew immediately jumps off to go check in with the Reluctant scene, a popular local bar.

### **Flying the Opening: Another Local Point of View**

In 2014, I accompanied an Alaska State Trooper on his flight to monitor fleet behavior on the first day of the Copper River opening. Unlike most of the other portraits, this piece depicts the role of a person who has an active role in the fishery but is not a fisherman. He identifies with the industry, and is well aware of how it operates but his job is to monitor and regulate fleet behavior without participating directly in the fishery. However, despite a separation from the fleet itself, the Trooper does seem fairly considerate to what is happening on the water, and well-aware of behavior and the tactics of how the fleet will likely respond given when and where fish are available. This dimension, a familiarity with the industry but with a different intention on opening day, reinforces how central this fishery is to the community. It demonstrates different aspects of how the industry functions and therefore contributes to part of the story of Cordova as a fishing community. What I heard during this brief interaction was more distanced and detached from the essential fleet behavior but still clearly a local voice and opinion. The experience was a meaningful way to observe this feature of industry regulation and enforcement.

The composition of this portrait is based more literally on what Mark expresses than with any sort of interpretive lens on my part. He is informative and straightforward in tone.

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Thursday, May 15, 2014 is when the first salmon fishery opens in the State of Alaska. The primary species of harvest is sockeye salmon though the other species are present in the open area, too. I leave the house at 5:40 am to get to the airport on-time for a plane ride with Trooper Mark. I arrive a few minutes before him and wait while he preps the plane for a few more minutes. I take a few notes before getting on the plane. Mark gives me a complete safety

briefing—he claims the most important feature is the bright red button right in front of his seat that will provide safety coordinates if the plane is to lose control. The rear of the plane is full of safety gear, food, camping equipment. He says that he mostly intends for the morning flight to monitor the line—later in the day he'll go out farther over the water but this morning we'll mostly be right by the beach. Mark calculates for a moment and tells me that he's been flying for 35 years. As we climb into the plane we talk about it a little bit and he said he learned about it from crop dusting—"a pilot took me up, asked me if I wanted to learn and I've been ready to fly ever since."

The basic Alaska Department of Fish and Game Copper River district map is from approximately 144-146 degrees west and 60 degrees north. We are flying from the Cordova Mudhole airport on a plane with wheels/ not floats. We passed so many birds on the way out—swans in the lake, geese. Some of the birds are even laying on the road—but it is early. There is no traffic, the road is totally flat, the sun is not over the mountains yet but it is very bright out. No wind. There is still fog on the runway, although it's lifting, and absolutely nothing happening at the airport. The runway flags have no wind in them. I hear birds everywhere. It is completely calm on the runway.

Once underway, the flight is approximately 27 miles from the airport, across the flats to Kayak Island in the Bering River district. This is where the fishery opens and why we are heading there specifically. Mark starts the flight by telling me, "this is literally the calmest and sunniest opening I have ever flown on an opening day." I'm not sure how long Mark has been living in the region, but based on his commentary I am under the impression that it's been several decades, there is a definite sense of familiarity. The fishery opens at 7 am and Mark takes off at almost exactly 6 am. He tells me that he wants to fly a bit in-land so the fleet doesn't

see him right away—he wants to monitor the opening line about 15 minutes before the start of the fishery. The fishery is open for 12 hours and Mark says he plans to fly this period early, take another flight at about 10:30 am, possibly one more in the early afternoon and then make sure he's out to watch the closure. He says he plans to fly lower on the closure so that he can observe the boat's entry code numbers if necessary. The entry code is what he will need if the boat is engaging in any illegal behavior. There are subsistence boats out this morning also—about 15 of them—and Mark can identify some of the boats just by appearance but subsistence regulations are different than commercial vessel requirements.

Mark tells me about some of the details of the first opening—he says that he expects to see a few float planes out early in the day to go and pick up some of the first fish and get it to the airport for departure on Alaska Air. “The marketing of this fishery is amazing. They’ve really done well for these folks.” We are flying over South Slough—Mark points out Alaganik Slough, South Slough, Katalla. We’re too far over the river to see the islands—but they’re also totally flat, no elevation for visibility. At 6:40 am Mark says, “we’ll give ‘em five more minutes and then head up the line.” I am sort of in awe of the clarity, sun, expanse of the Delta. “Can you believe we’re actually getting paid for this!?!?” Mark asks me. No, I almost can’t.

Mark explains the basic commercial harvest area—it goes right to the barrier islands: Strawberry Reef, Kokenhini, Orca Islands, Copper Sands and Egg Island. From the far south east side of the flight we can see Kayak Island, and Mark points out the Cape St. Elias lighthouse—or where it would be if we were close enough to see it. The outside of Kayak Island is how most fishermen would travel if they were headed south down the Gulf of Alaska—the inside waters are generally too shallow for larger boat traffic. Cape Suckling is the farthest south east point on the main land and marks the end of Prince William Sound.

There is an interior closure, especially for the intention of sparing Chinook salmon harvest. “Head up the line” means to fly right along, literally, directly on the closure line. He wants the fleet to know that the Troopers are out and watching—but he says it in a very sympathetic manner. He tells me, “I really have a lot of respect for what these guys do out here. I’m really happy for them. You know, I think they like us to be out too—they don’t want guys over the line either—they want people playing by the rules. If one guys messes up and takes some from a spot they aren’t supposed to be, that’s not going to help anyone out.”

As we turn to head back towards the west, there is an amazing sandy beach, tall rocky cliffs. There are lakes everywhere. They look like tiny puddles, nothing much more than raindrops everywhere along the flats. As soon as we are over ocean water Mark immediately sees a pair of whales and I notice them, too. I see a sea lion—can see the entire body line of the animal, it is very close to shore. The water is fairly murky, it looks to me like it would be difficult for spotting fish with the water in this state. I ask Mark what the standards are for fishermen’s use of pilots to spot fish. In general, our conversation is a bit scattered as I notice features of the fishery that do not catch my attention when I am on the boats themselves. Mark is responsive to the arbitrary flow of my comments and questions. He also points features out to me just as we see them. Immediately after talking about spotter pilots, he directs my attention to the red “Ketchup” boat—it’s one of the Russian Old Believer boats that the entire fleet can spot with no question. It is bright red and is somehow (or claimed to be) partnered with the “Mustard” boat—bright yellow. Mark continues to tell me how careful most of these guys are about being in the line. He says that sometimes they will set buoy markers to help them make sure they don’t drift over it.

At 6:57 Mark says, “we’ll run the line now. We still have a minute or so before it opens.” I personally cannot recognize any boat identification number from the sky, we are too high and the numbers are on the side windows or somewhere on the bow. He keeps telling me about various regulations and what the consequences are. Specifically, he mentions a series of tickets/ offenses that result in “points” removed from the permit holder’s available points and the various fines that go with each offense. He says the first ticket is a \$3000 fine, the second is a \$6000 fine and the third is a \$9000. The lingo for the offenses is “the slaps on the wrist that you get.” Eventually, you lose access to your permit—you don’t lose the permit but you can’t fish with it after receiving a certain number of offenses. “Now, what we’re going to look for first is for guys who have anchored or grounded gear—that’s also not permissible.”

At 7:00 the fishery opens and you can see some boats set their gear immediately! At this point we are above the grassy banks of egg islands, “Look at these guys! They’ve probably been sitting here for four days to trap their fish into the small area between two boats.” We talk about how long they typically let their net “soak.” What’s typical versus other ways to do it—it all depends on how much fish is in there. The nets can be in the water all day but if they are getting full the fisherman may pull the net back in to clear out the density of the catch.

We see one stern hauler behind Egg Island—these boats are unusual now. “I would guess there might only be 12 or so even left in the fleet,” Mark says. Mark continues to point out locations—“Government Rock, Whitshed—you can drive to about 6 miles from there, those tents are the subsistence egg gatherers!” I see four tents. “Oh, and here’s Boswell Bay—we’re pretty close to the air strip.” Finally, he gives an exhale of work—“well, I want to go check and make sure the Russians are doing ok.” It’s almost as though he’s talking to himself—like he’d be making these comments regardless of whether or not I was in the plane. He points out



another small skiff doing subsistence work. “See that guy down there? He’s 80 years old! Out fishing by himself.” And then tells me the man’s name and how considerate he is to the community, how much fish he probably harvests as subsistence and then gives away. Mark sighs at another subsistence boat, “now that fellow there? Hmmm. I need to take a look—you can’t intentionally ground your gear—that’s meant to be a drift net and you can’t put it on the beach and leave it to let fish hit it.”

In the final part of the flight, I pay attention to the GPS screen. Mark has the closure coordinates with a line drawn on it. He flies back and forth over a few boats who appear to be fishing over the line. For two of them, he drops down from the cruising height to get the vessel identification numbers and does write them a ticket. He says, “I’ll just leave them for now. They don’t need to stop fishing—I mean they’re only open for 12 hours and I don’t want to take the fish time away but they shouldn’t be over the line! Now that you’re with me, I have a witness, too!” As he flies over the line several times he marks the exact GPS spot where he sees the fellow over the line. Later, as I tell folks about my flight experience, I am informed that the drift boats rarely have GPS equipment on them—so, they often put channel markers or anchor buoys into the channel so they can make sure they don’t drift over it.

My flight with Mark is coming to closure. “Alright,” he says, with resignation. We are headed back to the airport (and he makes the radio information transfer), we talk briefly about coming back out. “I’m going to make a few phone calls, do a little write up and then be back out here a few more times today.” He tells me he will definitely come out for the closure at 7 PM and that I should not plan to come for the flight because he’ll be out over the water a little more and that he’ll probably be checking into the vessels a little more closely.” He lands the plane very quickly, straightforward—ties it down, gets everything put away and is practically in the car

as soon as I am. Actually, he is so efficient that I hardly even notice what he's doing to secure the plane, even though I'm paying fairly alert attention.

### **If the Boats Could Speak**

What influences marine architecture? Historically, what materials have been used? What is the role and availability of materials? I imagine transitions in expected and suitable designs in the evolution over time. There is a mourning for the wooden boats left to rot as trash, derelict, destroyed or abandoned. All along the Sterling Highway of the Kenai Peninsula a glance or two towards the ditches provides a history of our old boats; an observer can find you see them everywhere.

There are several themes in this portrait. One, the boats themselves visually share a story in the evolution of the fishing industry. There are changes in design and construction material. I consider material artifacts in fishing gear beyond the boats: wooden buoys made from cedar--literally in the shape of a “keg” --reminding me why my mother still refers to them as “buoy kegs.” There are old wooden corks, net lines of natural, untreated fiber, fishing boots that weren’t the same as our rubber Xtratufs today. These boats and objects of the industry are a dimension of our heritage. The boats tell a story of changing attitudes. It was not long ago that the Russian Old Believer style boats were teased, characterized with sarcasm (and sometimes they still are, such as in Old Salt above). Now, even over a relatively brief passage of time that I have worked through this dissertation, the boats are becoming more standard in the industry. Today, they do not receive quite the same ridicule that I heard when I started.

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The Homer dock in early March is relatively empty. Relatively. But, across the clouds are slight declarations of clatter: there is a creak and movement at the fuel station, brief clangs and screeches, a vocal commotion at the deep-water dock by the Icicle property. There are four boats tied on the cannery posts. I see one or two sets of footprints in the snow on the dock—not

many. Was there a thought when that crunch step came? Maybe one or two people made these. Fishermen walking into their cold galleys—wishing the stove was on, viciously rubbing their hands together. Looking for something to drink. I know the men in the Bering Sea region also have their boats stored in Homer—the people are just not here. They contribute to the empty yard. The boats are working cod. Likely complaining about cod—but out there on the water just where I can't quite see. Just around the corner from Kachemak Bay. Out in the Gulf.

There is a big, clean pick-up truck backed up to the ramp. There is a woman inside and three children in the back. The truck is turned off. I walk down the ramp and see a Russian boat. The broad, physical features are clear—a proud brow, a stern brow, a foreboding brow (to some people). The owners speak English but it's not the only language they are speaking. The woman sits patiently in the passenger seat, her hair covered with a bright silky scarf, flowery—coverage is evidence of marriage. She is just sitting and waiting and she might be in charge of it all. I walk down to the boat she is attached to, not to chat but to quietly observe. Her husband explains work tasks for the day to a deckhand.

On the port window of the boat is a handwritten flyer. A plain piece of white paper. Scrawled quickly but intelligibly—it has to be clear enough for anyone. Any audience willing to interpret it will get the point immediately. “Will fish IFQ's. Cod. Halibut.” There is a cell phone number and home number included. I try to take a quick glance through the metal shed on the stern of the boat. There are hooks and lines and a deck winch, a central deck tool on a commercial boat that is used to mechanically haul heavy (1000+ pounds) gear/ lines/ pot equipment back onto the deck of a boat. A boat with gear only for drift fishing would not have this device. The wheel is currently empty of line.

Then, there are several seiners. Seine life is quiet right now but quickly picking up in the boat yard. The herring boats are going in the water soon, today in fact. March first! A few of the seiners are already tied up, some will go to Sitka and some will not. I don't see any ice so there should not be any problems with harbor time. I can see that the seiners down below the Salty Dawg—that main float are near to family or social groups. Maybe two boats with the same owner.

One boat, the Sea Prince, provides nostalgia—I remember when it was newly built, when I first got to work as a “real deckhand” with “real wages” with my father. I was 15 when I went to Southeast and that boat was brand new. One of my best friends worked on it. Another gal I know worked on it for a summer in the Sound. It does not sparkle quite as much anymore. I catch a funny choice of colors, a ship design that has been altered, modernized a bit. The owner has a new boat in the shop that probably will not be ready for Sitka herring but everyone thinks he will be able to travel to the Sound for salmon.

In the harbor the rails look cold. They look empty and dull, no hand prints or mud. I would rather see hands gripping them. Men jumping over the sides. I'd rather hear engines, see net piles, see steam coming out of the galley window. And then, I can't believe I'm saying that. It is almost March. The days are getting longer. Day extends to six or seven at night. It's almost herring time. It's almost summer time.

Summer time for me means chaos time and child time. There are benefits to this and periods of sheer annoyance. I talked to another fish mom recently who told me how much she likes to throw things at the wall, break glass. Baby, kid time can be misery without a fully designated assistant. Alone. They get to do all the work they want, see the water, see the fish. We are stuck with babies. Crazy time.

What if the boats spoke to each other? Do they? Are they like family, too? Are they annoyed with each other? Can the characters who run them be seen through the image variations in the boats? We can see those who look alike and those who have a different heritage. There are the very obvious differences. That is a crabber, there is a seiner, that is a drift boat, that is the boat that takes the tourists out, that is the boat that gets across the bay. The boat over there hasn't left the harbor in years! The ones in the boat yard are definitely waking up. Ready to join the water.

I think of the harbor as a waiting space—a place to settle, mill around, chat with friends before launch. They can creak with the tight lines and complain or stretch, talk about what happened this winter. Was something repaired? Was it a more simple year? The lines are tied tight and though the discussion ensues—if the boats are in the water, most are ready to go. “Harbor is safe, that’s not what we’re for,” they remind each other.

Then I think about the decay. The ones left behind or too old and the stories *they* hold. I see old skiffs covered with a beard of kelp; like an old man. All the boats in the buildings that are boarded up. The boat dump lot. The boats that are grounded. Then, the boats that are “middle-aged” who do not want to be grounded but can’t quite compete well enough. “Fix me! Please. I do not want to sit here,” they try to say.

I contemplate the truly old structures. Almost like skeletons. I think of a boat my grandfather built. I love those ribs. I love those perfect lines of nails and wood edges blended together. And it sits here. In the grass, in the snow. Nowhere to go. No planks to hold it up. I want to see diagrams of old tall ships, whale ships, wooden boat diagrams. What did the shipwrights make? How did they learn that? How did they get things so precise? I look at the windows lined

up perfectly, too. Imagine the men leaning out of them. Laughing, delivering salmon, pulling up cod and crab. The diagrams inside the boat plans—considered carefully.

I think of the other old boats I see. Pulled up in driveways, resting against the side of buildings. They'll never move again. But those frames! Those frames last so long. I think about other pieces left behind and what they might say, what they can tell me. The crab pots put in piles that are not used anymore. The snow still piled high on them. When the summer comes, it should be the down time—but the snow time? “Why can't we work? Where should we be? Why are we here?” The pots are piled up—quickly, no order. They have certain sizes—the round, rectangle, the slanted sides. Against the edge of shops or just piled up in the middle of nowhere. Someone had to get rid of them quickly and the pots are bored, want to be working. “This is not what we were meant for. We don't want to sit here,” the pots whine to each other. Then, I think of all the pots on the bottom of the ocean. Would they rather be there? Under water? Lost? I think yes.

Cordova. May. The salmon season starts on the 15—every year. The streets are busy, bustle and vibrancy is in the air. Anxious and excited energy in every store and building. I see green rain gear, campers, crows, orange gloves, cigarettes, pick-up trucks. I hear gear being loaded and rearranged with gear and equipment, groceries and nets—the whine and squeak of a crane is audible from yards and yards away. Movement is everywhere. The skippers and deckhands hum; hands vibrate. There is urgency. Uncertainty. No one knows what to expect, yet. Every step opens another conversation—everyone yells a “hello” at buddies across the way.

I am on a new float—maybe “J” float. The boats are different here. The bows look more powerful. I've heard fishermen express how easy it is to identify them. I have heard that they are made from molds, that it's bold. It's metal. It's typecast. The names are unusual, confident.

Obvious enough that in addition to the intense metal stereotype you can sense those names are the Russian boats. Names like: Foreigner, Boss, Adventure, Stranger, Killer, Compass, About Time, Rush N Fury, Descendant, Kryptonite, Linear, Momentum, Legacy, Prototype, Predator, Sharp, Steep.

When I hear the comparison in interviews—the story about *how* the fishery works is relatively the same. Men describe the same challenges, the weather, the waves, and the same passages. The same sandbars. Strawberry Entrance, Egg Island, Grass Island, Kokenhini. The Old Believer men seem more humble in how they portray the conflicts—they describe it as “just fishing” or “you know, sometimes there is a yell or two.”

The others, the local men who agreed to meet me in the evening and casually complain, often are willing to say more. They drink their beers; joke and laugh about those boat names. Some of the stories I hear on both sides make it very clear that the bias is there. There is bitterness. I think I can express it through the boats themselves. They are unique but prototypical in a way. A fisherman can drive down a line of boats in the yard and easily point to the ones from the Russian community and the ones from Cordova.

There is ego to the Russian boats, in their own way. I see it in the boats themselves more than I hear with the people I speak with. They know they’ll put the time and effort into their own and everyone else’s fish. They will fish that other quota. Those boats will stick it out for the entire year. Throw out their shoulder. Prove it. Demonstrate ability. They are tough and they are very willing to do any extra work. And, they’ll drag their family with them. No questions. Those boats aren’t built to be pretty; they’re built to be tough, functional and work the conditions for cod in the winter.



What if the boats in this fishery—Prince William Sound, drift-boats--talked to each other? But they are not all grouped on the same pier. Walk down “J” float and they’re all related—they don’t dock in the other spots. They’ll interact when they’re out on the water, on the flats where everyone is working. They’re not going to deal with being taunted or intimidated just because the other boats think the names sound funny. They’re working to make the money to support the family. They get accusations from law enforcement, too. On one opening, they were way too close to the line. Some were probably over the line. The only boats that got tickets were the Russian boats. That’s not fair. But, no one listens to them. ADFG’s law enforcement insincerely apologizes, “just doing our job! Sorry.” I hear conflicting voices. Last year there was some discussion with Fish and Game to open the flats on a Sunday. Other permits would love that, religion does not tolerate work that way. The idea did not pass the board.

In 2012 at Homer’s boat yard, Northern Enterprises there was a vessel explosion, gas lit with fire as a suicide attempt. What lead to this event, this disaster? This individual who expressed a weapon and set the boat on fire with an explosion. What happened on that boat the *Slava II*? It was a Russian boat—everyone knew that from the name of the boat and the name of the individual who caused the scene. There must be much more to it than fish but I do wonder what motivated this action? Why was this explosion necessary from the perspective of the individual? The cause may have been his own distinctly personal issues but a dimension of external social conflict could have influenced this action as well.

The *Slava II* is a hull now. There is a pile of orange rain gear thrown, cast underneath the vessel. Probably at least five jackets. They are covered in black grime. There are gloves, too. I look at the metal sides of the shed and they are obviously blown out. Cracked, destroyed, shards. Danger tape once hung around the sides of the boat. No one was to be near it. Troopers

and boat yard crew needed time and space to clear the scene—but it didn't clear. My brother's boat is set up on blocks less than 10 feet away from this one. Today the deep wind of a winter storm blows off the bay—certainly no boats going in the water today. Sound is whistling through all the wires, all the lines. I wonder, probably unnecessarily, how windy it needs to be for the yard to be a hazard—this boat, I feel certain is a hazard. The roller is still right there. I reach the water line right at my height. The only two words I can see where I stand are: Anchor Point. The ship's home port. It certainly is at a final anchor point.

In Homer, the tension of culture is not nearly as obvious. The fishing cultures, the Russian cultures and the others do interact with each other more regularly than I see in Cordova. They share services daily. Kachemak Gear Shed sells just as much with no bias. NOMAR, the marine fabric business in Homer, Alaska developed primarily with a focus on drift gear bags, no bias. Community? Probably some conflicts but not in the same way we see in Cordova. The fisheries interactions are bigger here, more diverse. They are not just that one little link of summer salmon. True, Copper River salmon is a big industry in this state but the boats go in the water and come back to the ground for a short summer season.

There is very little participation in groundfish—cod, halibut—in the community of Cordova. When the salmon season is finished, fishing is finished. And things are changing quickly these years. As those Prince William Sound drift permits open up for sale, they are typically sold to the Russian fleet.

There is tension. Cordova residents express salmon as “our community.” What would it be if the salmon was all caught by people who were not residents? The permit scene is changing. Almost half of the permits are based out of the Homer zip code now, many of the permit holders in this zip code have the same last names.

I consider the “rights” of residency. What does home location mean? What about residency that was kayak, row boats, Eyak? Up river catches for subsistence and trade? Who gets to say when one group has the right to take over, reorder the basic details of standards, regulation and prioritization of access?

All ships come and go—those fancy schooners, the rigs of sail, the tall ships<sup>16</sup>—still beautiful to the eye, still remodeled for events like ocean classrooms and tourism. As boat designs transition, preferences of the public eye and judgement change, too. At this time, 2019, the bias once held against the boats identified as “Russian Old Believer” boats is diminishing and they are becoming more common with the larger fleet.

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<sup>16</sup> Or, like the example addressed in Chapter 3: Backdrop: Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Fishing Communities: Captain Ed Shields [Salt of the Sea: The Pacific Coast and the Last Days of Sail](#).

### **Salmon is Just Fish: The Last Name with the Most Permits**

The interview for this portrait took place with a Russian Old Believer at a coffee table in the Gear Shed, a primary fishery supply shop in Homer, Alaska. At the time, there was a very noticeable sense of respect and polite discussion and the individual's commentary is not nearly as casual or conversational as some of those that I encountered in the community of Cordova. Though the tone of this conversation was more formal than others, this young man was willing to discuss his participation in several commercial fisheries on an annual basis. This diversity of participation in both species and region is a significant difference than what I heard from most of the Cordova residents. The interviewee explained his participation with the Copper River fishery but he did not describe it with a boasting or pretentious tone as though that particular fishery has more significance than others that he works in.

When shared with reviewers, this portrait prompted two particular responses. One regarded how easy it was to identify the interviewee's family name even though it was not included in documentation and the other about interpretations of dangerous marine conditions. When I asked a reviewer to read this piece his response was primarily related to deciphering personal identity of the portrait: "I'm not sure if you have offered confidentiality to the participants, but with a title like this, we all know who this family is. Not necessarily this participant, but someone closer to the family or who knows the fishery better could figure it out from the dates and his age." The "we all know" dimension is specifically related to members of the fishing community;

not necessarily beyond that. The surname is also a feature that can be determined by searching the permit records of the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission<sup>17</sup>.

Two other reviews were in distinct disagreement of the following comment in the portrait: “the further you go, you can almost say that the more dangerous it is because if you’re fishing close by Cordova—once the wind starts blowing you just go into port.” TL stated, “I highlighted one area that I believe is untrue. The Flats are much more dangerous than the Sound with bar crossing, big surf, high winds, and open ocean. When we lose a fisherman or boat it is almost always on the flats.” A second reviewer mentioned this same area: “In the interview with the Old Believer he says the further you go from town into the Sound the more dangerous it gets. Most of the deaths in the fleet come from crossing the bars on the flats or fishing the ocean close to town. When you go to the Sound the waters are much more protected and there are no bars to cross and so it is much safer, in fact lots of people who would never dream of bringing kids out on the flats will bring them to the Sound.”

Addressing the topic of death seems particularly extreme and to witness it mentioned twice suggests that this feature of weather impacts related to physical dimensions of the flats could be explored further. It also is all a good reminder about the dangers of the industry in general.

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I do my salmon gill-netting in Prince William Sound and I do long-lining grey cod in Prince William Sound in early February. I fish halibut in August and sometimes in September. Then, I

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<sup>17</sup> The Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission public search application can be found at: <https://www.cfec.state.ak.us/plook/#permits>.

fish grey cod in January. Not this year, not 2013, but I usually do. I guess that's about all year. The drift fishery is most important to me—it's the salmon and it's the longest season. We do it for about four months of the year and halibut and grey cod are about two months each. Most of my income is from gill-netting in the Sound.

I started fishing when I was maybe 12 years old as a deckhand with my dad—my brother and mom came out, too. At 16, I was running my own bow-picker. My uncles and cousins are out there. It really helps to have so much family. That way we always know where to fish—it really helps. And, if something happens out there and you need extra parts or something—there is always someone there to hand something over.

A lot of people you talk to might say the fishery is really an easy one. But that always matters with the weather. You're always out in the ocean—we never tuck in behind the islands or into any bay. Some days, when it's nice...when it's flat calm weather it's nice and sunny and you can almost say it's an easy job. In the springtime in our first periods there—it's always windy and it gets up to 35 or 40 knots and it can be very dangerous! Someone asks how it is; you can say it has ups and downs. If you're not scared of bad weather and you're not scared of the big waves (laughs), well, it's not bad. Go for it!

At the beginning of the season, the Copper fishery starts May 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>, and this is the area we fish—right outside these islands pretty far out of the river<sup>18</sup>. More towards July, we go fish chum in the Esther Island area. When we fish over there we still go back to Cordova because our families are there for the summer. It doesn't really take that long to get across the Sound.

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<sup>18</sup> The interviewee was pointing out the location on a chart of the Copper River.

Not everybody wants to do the fishery on the west side of the Sound. A lot of guys just stay in Cordova for the short season. That's one nice thing about Prince William Sound, we have a huge fleet and we can split up. Some guys can go fish chum and then we have another sockeye run on the Culross Island here. There's the Main Bay Hatchery. We have a sockeye run here, a chum run here and a king and coho, too. So, we can kind of split up our fleet and some guys can even fish chum in that Chalmers area—they just opened that up a couple years ago.

The further you go; you can almost say that the more dangerous it is because if you're fishing close by Cordova—once the wind starts blowing you just go into port. In the western Sound, it's a different story—you're all the way out here<sup>19</sup>! From Cordova all the way to the farthest island is probably about three hours. That's on a fast boat. That's going like 30 miles per hour.

Which, most of the fleet is converting to faster, updated boats than what my dad had 15 or 20 years ago. Back in the day, they just had boats that went eight or nine miles per hour. Now everybody is converting to faster and more convenient boats. About three hours to that furthest island. On the boats that they used to fish, it could take almost seven hours! I can't believe anyone would do that now! We're used to moving fast.

I would say that a lot of the fleet is Cordova locals—they've been around there so they just pass on their permits to their kids or nieces or nephews. Then, in the last ten years, I've noticed that a lot of people from Homer switched over to that area because of the bad seasons they had in the Cook Inlet. So, I have three or five uncles and maybe ten cousins that used to fish in Cook Inlet but they switched to this area. When we switched fisheries we didn't really sell the

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<sup>19</sup> Again, he is pointing out the other location on a chart as we speak.

permits. It's better to just hold on to them. I mean some guys sell but most guys hold on to them—in case circumstances improve. Like right now, things are kind of picking up here in Cook Inlet again.

I don't think I'd try another area. I've been fishing in the Sound since I was a kid and I'm very familiar with it. Most of my friends and family are here. I don't think I'd be able to go somewhere else. Maybe for curiosity; I wouldn't mind trying a different area but as far as if I had a choice to switch today? No, I probably wouldn't. And, for the winter, I wouldn't go too much farther because I want to be close to my own home, too.

I don't really see any problem with how the fleet gets along, I don't see it that way. I think we're just...well, we just go out together. There are always guys who say they hate this guy or that guy but, I don't really see many differences. To me, a fisherman is a fisherman. And out there, on the flats, we get spread out—it's a pretty area available.

The ages in the fleet are changing a little bit. When I started running a boat at 16, there was a lot of talk in town that there were such young kids—it was me and my two friends—their dads were fishing too. When my dad bought me a permit, their dad's bought permits too and we all started fishing. There were only three of us who were 16 at that time. It was a big thing. We were very, very young but right now I see a lot of young kids. It looks like their dad's retire. Compared to ten years ago? There weren't that many young guys running boats—it was all older, or at least people who were 25-30 years old. There are more young people now because of updated machinery—it's easier to run a boat than it used to be. Back in the day, stuff wasn't that updated! They didn't have updated GPS that can tell you exactly where you're at and radars. Back when dad started fishing, all they had was compasses and stuff like that. That's one of the things that really got the younger folks in: technology provides better fishing



equipment. And, another thing! The fishery got way better in the Ester area—it's a safe place to fish because it's very calm weather out there. You're covered by islands. Out in the flats—it's open oceans out here! I see a lot of the younger kids just wait until June and then fish here (Ester) and that's the only fishery they do. But me, I try to stay and fish silvers and stay in the Sound until the middle of September.

A lot of the older folks in Cordova, they don't like running around. They have their homes, their families' right there. They just go out, do their fishery, they're happy as long as they're home for the weekend versus the guys who over here—it's a long drive to get back to Cordova—so once they leave that area they'll stay over on the other side for a month or month and a half. The nearest port is Whittier if you have to go get groceries and our family might help us with that.

Our family does come for the summer, too. We bring our travel trailer and my wife and my one daughter stay in the trailer. They like it! Some summers there is a lot of rain and my wife gets tired of rain but other than that, she likes being out there. They're camping the whole summer. Most of the Russian families do stay in one trailer park in Cordova so if you come down, you'll have a dozen women to talk to.

Other big changes? Well, they developed the hatcheries—in the 70's and 80's when my dad first started fishing. The chum fishery wasn't really a big thing because of the prices and so not a lot of fishermen would go out. They'd rather go out and catch the wild sockeye and get the top dollar instead of going to catch the hatchery fish. But, right now, the prices really went up on the chums. So, that's something that's really different from 20 years ago. And, other than that, it has ups and downs, good seasons and bad seasons but it kind of stays the same.

The Exxon spill had an impact on the herring. It had an impact for quite a few years. The herring fishing was a big thing, a big impact. Those were the days right when the herring showed up and the crash happened. It was a bad area for those fish. I never fished herring—it was mostly the seiners, my dad and family have never seined.

Gill-netting is gill-netting—it all works the same.



## Chapter 7: Conclusion: Summary, Contributions and Future Directions

### “Our” Salmon or “The Gill-net Fleet is the Point of Community Pride”

Over the period of this work, it became apparent to me that the salmon fishery is not so much itself an occupation held with such significance by community residents but rather the symbolic role that the Copper River and the iconic salmon provide to a sense of community identity. The fishery as an occupation does provide direct economic support to many people in the community (though possibly not as substantially as implied in some cases), but there is also a social-cultural connection to this particular fishery, Copper River drift, that stretches beyond simply the commercial dimension to the Cordova residential fleet. The fishery and many components of participation within it contribute intensely to the character and identity of the community as a whole.

Some portraits such as “Fish Mom,” “When the Oil Spilled” and “First Day Flight” validate this interpretation. These present individuals with distinct local interest in the fishery even though the interviewee did not participate in the fishery directly. “Portrait of the Flats” captures some examples of the deeper cultural values of salmon also, based on personal observation of the natural environment and close conversation with a Cordova resident who served as an iconic acquaintance throughout the process of the research. In contrast, consider the portrait “Salmon is Just Fish: The Last Name with the Most Permits.” This represents an individual whose focus is more directly related to his participation in the fishery simply as an occupational opportunity—he does not highlight or prioritize any particular dimension of the Copper River salmon with any more value than his other annual pursuits on the water.

Cordova, like any community, has experienced transitions in natural resource availability and opportunities to utilize them. Many factors contributed to this: construction of the Copper River

Railroad to transport copper from Kennecott to the coast, the 1964 earthquake that altered the coastal habitat for commercial clamming, and the impacts of the 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Marine resource harvest has always been important, but salmon is a primary community fishery and local residents care about it very much. There is a sense of entitlement relative to “ownership” of the Copper River salmon because so many of the people that I spoke to and interviewed consider Cordova their home port and salmon as central to the economy of the community. However, as an increasingly large portion of permit holders are from outside the community and spend the summer in Cordova to pursue fishing income and not necessarily to promote the unique qualities of the Copper River community, there is a sense of annoyance from fishermen who are residents of the physical community of Cordova.

Frequently, locals refer to the distinct Copper River salmon as “our fish,” suggesting a sense of privilege. This is understandable—the Copper River is the closest river to the community with an early, wild-stock sockeye run that is well marketed and contributes substantially to the local economy. The sense of ownership has an impact on the way in which the notion of salmon resonates throughout different dimensions of the community, with the fishermen themselves (as in “Coffee Talk” or “Old Salt”), but also with local residents who do not participate directly in the fishery such as those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

An alternative example is that when speaking with fishermen, specifically the Russian Old Believer fleet, who are not local residents and who are also more likely to engage in more than one annual fishery, their emotional or cultural connection to the fishery seemed more detached and impersonal (see portraits “If the Boats Could Speak” and “Salmon is Just Fish: The Family with the Most Permits”). The piece “If the Boats Could Speak,” was informed by my visit to the Homer harbor to observe some of the drift boats and see if I could provide some accurate

characterizations regarding how the boats differ structurally from the boats owned by Cordova residents. In it I describe one that had a handwritten note taped to the inside of the window, “*Will fish IFQ’s. Cod. Halibut.*” “IFQ” refers to “Individual Fishing Quota” and this note indicates the owner’s willingness to engage in quota leasing, a practice sometimes more common with the Russian Old Believer fleet than others. This also demonstrates the significance of the general occupation of fishing rather than glorification of Copper River fishery specifically. Evidence of cultural connection to commercial fishing as an occupation was prevalent but the distinctive value of Copper River sockeye was less apparent.

This is a feature that separates Cordova dynamics from other mid-size Alaska coastal communities such as Homer or Kodiak, where fishermen are more likely to engage in fisheries not as proximate to their hometown. In those cases, the component of occupational culture is more prevalent than a specific connection to place or species. One way to explain this in the context of Cordova is to consider the role of a politically funded state agency (such as ASMI the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute) or a regional organization (Copper River Regional Seafood Development Association) and the efforts that have gone into creating a market for “Copper River salmon” as a distinctive type of fish. The symbolic resources these organizations provide empower the fisherman (especially if he or she does not engage in other fisheries) to promote the Copper River label as indicative of distinct product quality. Still, it is important to look at a longer historical collection of information and community opinion because although the Copper River species do have attributes such as an early seasonal arrival compared with sockeye in other parts of the state and many specialized, local marketing efforts—the fishery itself has not always been so principal. “Old Salt” is a portrait that mentions some of the other fisheries that in the past had more prevalence such as various species of crab and herring--most of which are now absent.

One large transition that generated change in the way the fish was perceived was the international rise in salmon aquaculture in the 1990's. This spurred general improvements in species handling (better bleeding and icing, reducing bruised flesh) and marketing tactics (independent sales and home businesses in addition to general cannery delivery) in order to portray wild-stock species as preferable to farmed fish.

I have included stories that reference Cordova's past (see "Visions from the Archives," for example) to demonstrate how change and transitions influence public values and viewpoints and therefore, community behavior. I do not think other substantial historic traits necessarily indicate that salmon fishery was less culturally valuable in the 1980's and early 1990's (or even earlier), what is different is the way the fishery is represented today. That feature, the role of "representation" in general and how it varies is also an important insight I have gained through this process. The context of how an individual presents his or her opinions matters significantly to the meaning a listener will perceive from them.

## 7.1 Landscape and Language

One of my other significant findings related to identity was that Cordova residents hold a real emotional sense of place and landscape that surrounds them. Interviewees frequently discussed very specific physical and geographic locations on a large spectrum: Bering River, Martin Islands, "the flats," Egg Island, Grass Island, Sherman Glacier, Eyak River, Hawkins Island, Sheep Bay, Gravina. There is an environmental awareness that truly seems to tie the residents to their remote location. The coastal weather challenges presented by snow, rain and fog are mentioned frequently, as though tolerance of these pressures demonstrates community perseverance. Here is an interview explanation (this was not converted from interview to portrait, but remains in transcript files) that serves as an example of this:

*“There are no other places in Alaska where I would live—this is exactly what I had been dreaming about. This is exactly what I’ve wanted since childhood—it has mountains, it has water, the delta! The Sound. The flats. There is so much diversity in the landscape. Rain and all, it’s still perfect. But, it’s not the place for everyone. A lot of people don’t like the water and storms, I find it exciting. People think that rain keeps them inside—but it doesn’t keep us inside. For people who live here year round, they like to be away from all the other amenities we could have. I like it.”*

This is an email response from an acquaintance living in Cordova when I asked her casually about the physical dimensions that define Cordova:

*“Life in Cordova is totally centered on the natural environment. Nestled on the side of a mountain overlooking the ocean, with one of Alaska's largest rivers just miles away, Cordova's scenic yet isolated location dictates the crummy weather, outstanding outdoor recreation and subsistence opportunities and the marine-based livelihood of many who live there. You can hunt for moose, catch a silver salmon or go canoeing out on the Copper River Delta, hike, ski or snow machine on Mt Eyak, Mt Eccles or the Heney range, pick blueberries and salmonberries out Hartney Bay, or head out towards Hawkins Island for deer hunting, some sport fishing, or both. Life revolves around the ocean, the tides and the harbor from May-Sept, as most Cordovans are in some way linked to the salmon fishery that provides a burst of energy come spring and supports the town, both mentally and economically.*

*The people who come to Cordova and stay love it because of the physical location--the variety of landscapes, the seasonal reliance on the ocean, the isolation that promotes helping out your neighbors...this all fosters a close-knit community, a sense of place, and for me, a town I'm proud to call home.”*



## 7.2 Fusion of Story Gathering to Public Performance

Public performance is not executed like a lecture or academic presentation, it is more visceral and considers expression tactics of creative composition. I use performance of stories to bring my observations and composed interpretations directly back to communities of fishermen. Regular performance at Astoria, Oregon's FisherPoet gathering and other venues has created a sense of cyclical and continual feedback about the community observed and a chance for me to hear casual commentary. There is no stagnation or sterilization to the process; information can be updated as necessary or provide opportunity for memory to materialize in terms of story and commentary.

Performance is a venue for interaction in many ways. In some cases, I look for readers willing to perform the written material—this serves as an outreach into community because I can find a voice suitable to the character portrait. For example, when the portrait is based on a gruff, male character, if I can find a reader/actor who fits this character there is an opportunity for better representation to the audience than if I read the piece myself. It also allows me to observe more in the actor-audience interaction and see if there is an audience member particularly engaged in the commentary who may be able to provide another story or another voice to the existing piece of writing or a new one altogether. I recall reading "Raise the Bar" in Cordova and in discussion afterwards with the father of a young fisherman, he began telling about some of the challenges his son had in getting his business started and some of the juvenile mistakes he made during his first years as a fisherman.

Community performance offers a practical and enlivened venue to share and rejuvenate material where sheer academic, technical or quantitative analysis and discussion is sometimes more likely to stagnate controversial topics. Shared creative writing in general offers a similar

venue towards mutual understanding or exploring a full expanse of vernacular to provide the most honest and integral expression. Creative writing, both in the portraits and poetry, offers a timeless component to the stories I heard and experiences that informed the whole process of this research and the larger character of the community. Human society is complex and pluralistic; communicating and interpreting social groups dissimilar to ourselves is important and it cannot be accomplished solely by statistical analysis. In my views across the fields I contribute to now (anthropology, journalism, creative writing), it is necessary to listen to the varied dimensions of interpretation or one will not hear the entirety of story. This is challenging—bias exists. I am aware of where mine is but believe I have honest intentions and am confident that the venues where I have chosen to share work contribute to describe “the other side of the story,” too.

Beyond writing and the gift it provides readers, I believe the words should be shared orally in order to fully achieve the potentials for outreach and communication. In the case of this research and the interest in understanding varied opinions in Alaska fisheries, storytelling or performance offers a method to share differences within the industry without encouraging explicit controversy over argumentative topics. Performance, with its aesthetic dimensions, and narrative prompt listeners to experience and consider varied perspectives, without feeling the need to defend their position on the issue. Controversy is implicit in bringing up some themes, but in performance and portrait narratives there is a separation between the points of conflict directly and the representation of that conflict through the medium of enactment.

Additionally, creative performances offer a venue of communication primarily intended for entertainment and as a result the audience interaction with storytellers occurs more informally and perhaps more naturally with a fluid sense of conversation rather than venues where story is

defined as testimony and therefore presented as a report or an established opinion rather than opportunity for discussion and shared communication.

In the case of this particular project and the role of the Russian Old Believers, I appreciate the opportunity to 1) share the stories from Russian Old Believer fishermen and explain where some of their occupational values diverge from the resident Cordova fishermen and, 2) perhaps demonstrate the very distinct bias that the “insider” group has towards them. Also, this notion draws me back towards some stances regarding environmental justice that I heard expressed by fishermen. Most notably: ownership of a natural resource or the idea that commercially harvested salmon in the Copper River are “ours” which implies they are not “yours.” A particularly controversial claim I would like to share with Cordova residents is that these notions of a proprietary hold on a certain species come simply as a result of where the person lives and how he or she grew up fishing. This idea is something approached cautiously in the portraits. It is implied but not explicit. Without at least an attempt to consider the perspective from the other side creates a sense of tenacity. The opportunity to express that opinion on a public but non-political stage allows for more sympathetic listening because I never push a listener to change his or her opinion or to side with me (or the voice represented in the portrait), I share a story, waiting to hear what interpretation might come from it and what opportunities for conversation may ensue to help share divergent dimensions of the account.

### 7.3 Continued Opportunities for Feedback

In addition to sharing the works in public performances during the primary period of fieldwork and data collection, I have more recently sought other forms of feedback and dialogue with the portraits. Through direct contacts (either in-person consultation or by sharing the

character portraits by email) with fishermen who participate in the industry or residents of Cordova who were recommended to contribute feedback, I was able to continue a dimension of the process of sharing local experiences. Essentially, sharing the composed portraits allows dialogue to continue and rejects the illusion of closure and completeness promoted by other forms of ethnographic writing. As dialogue continues, there is an opportunity to observe how people understand the changes and transitions to the industry that have taken place since the portraits' composure. Some of this is available for observation through Appendix D: Review of Written Portraits.

The format of ethnographic writing that was utilized in this research--a series of composed portraits—I believe will allow this research technique and composition model to continue beyond the completed dissertation. This will occur in ways that would be less likely if it had been written in a style and format more typical of manuscripts that reference “ethnographic findings,” in a style intended for an academic or policy-based audience. The portraits are detachable and their future circulation or performance opportunity in a FisherPoet style setting will allow validation of topics explored, approval (or suggested adjustments) of what was composed, affirmation of whether or not the material remains accurate or if it has changed. As stories are shared repeatedly, under varying circumstances, research awareness of “community” deepens and the intricacy of community-identity expands. A concluding challenge of this is that it becomes more formally difficult to relinquish or finalize research interests that are constantly transitioning and adapting over time. In sum, there are several venues that allow continued engagement with the community: performance opportunities, media and journalism publication, review of “portraits” with electronic (email) responses, in-person discussion with a solo reviewer, and dialogue with multiple reviewers. A concluding challenge of this is that it is

difficult to relinquish or finalize research interests that are constantly transitioning and adapting over time.

#### 7.4 Final Thoughts and Intentions for Future Endeavors

Finally, I want to suggest how the dimension of my personal relationships and experience with Alaska commercial fishing has benefited research and ethnographic composition. My familiarity with the industry in many dimensions offered an insightful perception that granted interviews and observations that would have been more elusive without this background understanding. This subjectivity does also imply a preconceived bias, and perhaps more challenge in looking for what a researcher new to the experience of commercial fishing may observe more easily. Considerations of the potential impacts of bias raises questions such as: Is it acceptable or under what circumstances is it acceptable to have such a subjective analysis? The process of composing and sharing the portraits publicly raises new questions. Do the emotional responses through the portraits that include poetry contribute or detract from what the portraits can provide as a more generalized or objective ethnography? In addition, there is the consideration of subjectivity as it pertains to a composition style with an aesthetic dimension that is not neutral. Observation through literary expression is a basic way that I have come to understand and describe the community of Cordova.

The way memories are expressed is based on the personality and experience of the person who holds them, the general context of the setting in which the conversation ensues as well as the character of the listener. Then, if the stories from memory are to be repeated or shared secondarily—as they are in this dissertation, in a performance setting, or a journalism piece—the personality of the writer (or artist) inevitably joins with how the individual’s story originally

emerged. Through the process of public performance, incorporating reviews from the composed portraits and continually engaging in conversations (sometimes as simple as a single question), narration is available as a continuous method to understand, validate and share community identity. Indeed, it makes the closure of story difficult because change and adaptation is constant and opinion related to details within a personal story will always vary depending on circumstance but the composition of it provides some dimension of finality.



Appendices  
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

**Institutional Review Board**

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January 5, 2012

To: Maribeth Murray

Principal Investigator

From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB

Re: [188988-3] Cultural Dimensions of Community Response Preparation and Vulnerability  
to Future Oil Impacts of the Copper River Region

Thank you for submitting the Continuing Review/Progress Report referenced below. The submission was handled by Exempt Review. The Office of Research Integrity has determined that the proposed research qualifies for exemption from the requirements of 45 CFR 46. This exemption does not waive the researchers' responsibility to adhere to basic ethical principles for the responsible conduct of research and discipline specific professional standards.

Title: Cultural Dimensions of Community Response Preparation and  
Vulnerability to Future Oil Impacts of the Copper River Region Received:  
December 2, 2011

Exemption Category: 2 Effective Date: January  
5, 2012

This action is included on the January 19, 2012 IRB Agenda.

*Prior to making substantive changes to the scope of research, research tools, or personnel involved on the project, please contact the Office of Research Integrity to determine whether or not additional review is required. Additional review is not required for small editorial changes to improve the clarity or readability of the research tools or other documents.*



## Appendix B: General Interview Topics and Questions

### **Interviewee Record (DO NOT RECORD)**

Name, age, contact information (email/ phone), physical address and occupation, interviewee #.

### **START RECORDING HERE**

### **STATE INTERVIEW #, LOCATION OF INTERVIEW**

1. Do you consider Cordova “home”? How long have you lived here? Where did you move from? Or, what was it like to grow up here?
2. How much of the year are you physically in town?
3. Are there other locations (in Alaska or other places) where you would consider living?  
What qualities would you look for? How does Cordova compare to those places?
4. How would describe Cordova to someone who has never seen it?
5. What details define the community of Cordova?
6. What do you find appealing or unappealing about living here?
7. What are the first five words you can think of when I say “Cordova”?
8. What are the community boundaries? What are the key physical features?
  - a. Sketch a picture of the community; try to include at least 10 features (natural or human constructed).
9. What are the most important features about Cordova’s community identity? What defines Cordova?
10. What are the biggest historic transitions the community has experienced? Have you witnessed any of them?

11. How has the community reorganized over time? What challenges has the town faced?  
What benefits or advantages has the town experienced?
12. How does the size of the community influence community identity? (Does it?) How does the size of the community compare with other Alaska locations?
13. How cohesive is the community? How do community members interact?
14. What are the biggest challenges to establishing or maintaining community relationships?
15. How do you see yourself in the context of the social features of the community? What relationships are most significant to you? What is a typical day like?
16. What spaces or places within the community are most important to you? Where do you spend most of your time on a typical day?
17. What jobs or occupations would an outsider look for here?
18. Are there recurring seasonal variations in the community? How do seasonal changes influence social dynamics?

## Appendix C: The Records of Hubbell and Waller, 1920-1939

One prominent company, Hubbell and Waller, based out of Seattle, was responsible for the design and installation of many of the fish traps used in Alaska. This company was founded in 1920 as The Hubbell & Waller Engineering Corporation. It was a co-partnership between Charles S. Hubbell and Harold H. Waller and operated in southeastern Alaska and along the Aleutian chain. In 2008, the Northwest Digital Archives had a website titled “Guide to the Hubbell and Waller Records 1908-1976.” This website is no longer available but what I cited from there at the time to explain some of the intentions of the corporation included: “surveying homestead and mineral claims, trade and manufacturing sites, and salmon cannery sites as well as designing, surveying, and in some instances constructing pulp and saw mills, wharves, cargo handling facilities, hydroelectric power facilities, and private and municipal subdivisions, streets, roads, and water and sewer systems. [They] acted as consultants and agents for salmon canneries, oil companies, land developers, mining companies, pulp and lumber companies, and other commercial interests in conducting script transactions for their clients which secured titles to land in Alaska.”

Hubbell and Waller archival records, located at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, are significant source of information related to Alaska historical fisheries. Their clients included some of the largest canning and packing companies in the Pacific Northwest. Along with receipts and general correspondence regarding business records, the files include a series of “Client Files,” over 122 boxes containing Hubbell and Waller's corporate and individual correspondence with administrators, legal advisors and federal agencies such as the Chief of Engineers, United States War Department and the Secretary of the Interior. The archives contain Hubbell and Waller's administrative files: descriptions of cannery locations and trap listings, by the latitude and longitude of the actual trap as well as the name and address of the trap owner. Their client

was diverse: some individuals are listed as possessing a single trap while others show numerous traps. The Seattle-based New England Fish Company, for example, has 16 listings, Columbia River Packer's Association has five listings and PE Harris and Company has 29 listings. Few files showed clear Alaska ownership, but there are individual owners from the Kenai, Starisky and Tyonek areas. These records also indicate the time of arrival for parts and service, checks and money. Correspondence was from varied locations: Juneau, Cordova, Ketchikan and Wrangell. Other correspondence occurred by general hand-written mail.

In short, these records are a prime source for the history of Alaskan commercial fishery operations during this era. They also provide rich social-ecological details. For example, the original correspondence between Mr. Bartlett Long—hired by Hubbell and Waller to maintain salmon traps in the Prince William Sound region of Alaska and his supervisors – gives a fine sense of firm client relations at the beginning of the 1930s, as well as telling details of the interdependence of the social and ecological components of the commercial fisheries of the time.

The story begins with a letter from Hubbell and Waller confirming the employment of Mr. Bartlett Long and two follow-up telegrams.

May 22, 1929. *"Dear Sir: It is understood that you will be available leaving Seattle on June 1, on the steamer Yukon, to work for us in the summer in Alaska. Reservation has been made on this boat for your passage. It is also understood that you are to furnish your own transit; and your salary, for both transit and services to be \$150 per month and expenses. If there is any hitch in this matter, please advise us at once ...Very truly yours, Hubbell and Waller."*

Telegram: May 24, 1929. *“Expect to arrive Seattle about noon Tuesday unless you wish me before. Wish to bring army trunk bed roll and pack sack. If this is too much luggage for your boat please advise. BG Long.”*

The company not only wished Long to survey client operations on the coast, but also to assess any other operations in the area. This letter, signed HHW to BG Long, briefly describes the tasks to be completed in the local of Cordova, and also recommends discreetly surveying other nearby traps even though they belong to a different owner.

July 6, 1929. *“Dear Sir: You will proceed to Cordova and report to Mr. Bert Williams of the New England Fish Co. whose cannery is situated on the dock where the steamer arrives. The NFC have about eight or nine traps in Prince William Sound. Your contract furnishes quarters and meals while work is conducted—this is preferable because [you] can get around having considerable hotel and restaurant bills while at Cordova and Latouche. When you are finished with their work, you will proceed to Drier Bay or the Franklin Packing Co. at Latouche, and report to Mr. JN Gilbert...*

*Our contracts with the cannery men contemplate that they will furnish you with quarters and meals while you are doing their work and will furnish what transportation for what men and gear is needed...Of course, this does not include your board if you should be done with one job and waiting for a boat to go to the next one ....*

*We have gone over the matter of surveying adjacent traps, particularly the Booth Company and it is understood that you will do everything possible to re-survey the locations that are convenient to where you are working. As you recall we discussed this matter verbally and you are acquainted with the reasons for doing this. It is a good policy to tie in all other trap locations that are convenient to reach when you are making surveys...I recommend that you do everything possible to do this without taking up too much extra time of the boat from which you are working...*

*You will also please not discuss these matters with cannery-men or others, and all information you get in regard to these trap locations, distances, etc. is absolutely confidential and only the cannery-men for whom we are working are entitled to it." HHW*

A second letter (composed on the same date) from HHW suggests the pressing need for attending to other near-by traps:

*July 6, 1929. Dear Sir: -- In regards to additional work which may come up in the Prince William Sound district, you are authorized to survey any additional traps for other companies and if they should ask you what our charge will be on them, you can quote them \$60 each plus field expenses. You can explain to them what the \$60 covers, to wit: the survey in the field by our engineer, the complete compilation of maps, and the continued service. We do not solicit surveys from private individuals whose credit is unreliable, but any company or individual citizens who may have trap locations and who*

*are well recommended by the canneries you can take them on and advise that we will bill them from Seattle when the work is finished. Very truly yours, HHW.*

Long's reply graphically expresses dislike of being in a very remote location for an occupational task that is progressing poorly. More importantly, it provides a colorful picture of fish operations, including competition, on the coast:

*July 17, 1929. Dear "Boss": I've completed all of NEF's traps but one. And, I've plotted all the notes and found only one "Douglas Islander." He's not so much 'cause five minutes will fix him up and I have to go right by the trap anyway. Lucky! The weather has been dreadful and constant fog has rendered visibility the old sh---s and I've not be able to get the change shots over lights that I'd like to have—but I think we can make out.*

*Williams has been doing the "painting" and has put the worst of the cement patches too near the tide mark—and used ordinary white paint (against my advice)—and hasn't let me run the shores out as far as I wished. Of course I've not been alone to come within swelling distance of any other traps—let alone work Booths! I fooled him on one anyway—where he had one on either side of Booth and I insisted on tying his two together. He carefully "skipped" Booth's tail hold—however! Can you beat it? Maybe Gilbert won't go with me and I can slip in a few more miles of traverse.*

*I've drummed up the Pioneer business and hope to get the others. I'm quoting \$60.00 and expenses and telling 'em we'll do everything but "brail" (what a witty*

*word!) the traps for 'em for that figure. But I've some keen competition 'cause RR and Forestry guys do it for \$50.00 (the damned skunks!!) and beat us [unintelligible] guys out of a living! (To Hell with de' lumber barrows—les' all sing de' International!)*

*I'll get all I can anyway. Trig stations are scarce as virgins in a brothel up here. I've not found a single one yet—and Montague Island is “dotted” all over the charts..... So, I didn't feel so badly when one o' my traps landed two miles off shore (underlined four times)! I'm told that Hubbell had the same experience with some of Booth's, on Montague too.*

*I need some more “X-Sec” paper (Nick's not Roosian—he's SCOTCH!) and some notebooks and some more GIN! If I do Pioneer's work and Gilbert wants the Wakefield traps surveyed AND I get Premier's and Copper River's-- I may as well buy a house here in Cordova and ship my other [UNKNOWN] up! You'd better send the swag here—pick it up or get one of the tender's to bring it over to Drier Bay.*

*....This is a pretty delicate little “school-girl” game at best—and it's in a rough country—what? And, I'd like some large targets if you have any. These are pretty small for a low-power telescope. However, I'll “make out. I'll wire when I've completed NEF's traps (which should be day after tomorrow) ....*

*Cheerio “Long”. PS: “Yeah!! I'm sober---wot the 'Hell?’”*

The urgency to secure trap sites emphasizes the fact that pressure to secure appropriate ecological niches for salmon capture was building. Moreover, by the 1820s



there was growing commercial interest in appropriate sites for the expanding net and capture fishery technology: prime capture space was already at a premium, and this provides us with a good qualitative baseline for assessing later social-ecological pressure on stocks and people.

**Primary reference source**

UAF Alaska Polar Regions Collections. Hubbell and Waller Records. Series I, Administrative Files. Boxes 2, 45. Series II. Client Files. Boxes: 7-14, 24, 38, 57-59, 60-62. Series VI. Photographs. Series VII. Engineering Drawings.

## Appendix D: Reviews of Written Portraits

### Reviewers:

1. RL, female, age 40. Grew up in Cordova. Her family lives there and many participate in the fishery.
2. JP, female, approximate age 50. She has fished statewide in Alaska (approximately 10-15 years 1995-2005), previous gill-net permit holder in Cordova.
3. TL, male, approximate age 37. Raised in Cordova, lives there currently. Permit holder 5+ years.
4. AL, female, approximate age 38. Born and raised in Kodiak, currently lives in Homer. PWS drift permit holder for 5+ years, also participates in Cook Inlet drift fishery.
5. SS, male, approximate age 60. Long term permit holder in Cordova. Resident of Kasilof, AK and PS, female, approximate age 35. Copper River and PWS fisheries participant/deck-hand.
6. TL, male, approximate age 35. Raised in Cordova, lives there. Permit holder since age 18.

### Questions Provided to Reviewers:

What thoughts do these pieces remind you of?

Do you see/ find these stories/ portraits as “accurate”? How do they resonate to you?

What do they remind you of in your own experience? What might you add to them?

## 1. Notes from RL:

- RL, originally from Cordova, Alaska, responded by meeting me in-person in Homer, Alaska (where we both live) and provided some handwritten notes to “Fish Mom” and “Raise the Bar.” She had a particularly personal interpretation because these pieces represent her grandmother and brother.
- She provided thoughts/ responses on a paper copy of the portrait including these comments: *“Cordova is not for everyone. It is isolated and rainy but Cordovans are very proud of their town.” “Being mom is an integral part of the family business! You have to be self-sacrificing for family stability. Patience as mom is very important!” “Changes and transitions are a constant theme in fishing.”*
- Below are RL responses not directly connected to a phrase in the document:
  - “Great job setting the scene: tea pot on the stove, the silence, gma’s age and personality reflected in the way she doesn’t even get up to greet you.
  - “My grandma is selfless, patient, does not talk about herself. She is definitely understated, frank, critical and opinionated.”
  - “She is a super talented fur sewer, net mender, provided stability and gave up her own interests/ ambitions to stay home and be an amazing mom.”
  - “Grandpa was always the storyteller—always adventuring, loud, opinionated, kinda wild, intimidating.”
  - “Women and men had more defined roles in the past. Women = cannery worker, net mender, stay with family. Men = crab, fish, hunt. Today there are more neutral areas—men are net menders, women fish the flats—but it’s still not that common. I think it’s more common in the Sound, Bristol Bay, set-netting.”

- “Raise the Bar” is written differently than “Fish Mom” and it threw me off at first. You say you are interviewing 2 guys but I don’t get that. It may be authentic but it feels a little like rambling.”
- “In the introductory paragraph you did a bit of analysis—I agree, CDV fishermen do feel proud (entitled?) of their experience and can’t imagine having a “real job.”
- “It’s getting more common to have a deckhand—boats are getting bigger, boats head to the Sound to pick dogs, etc. and many can just use an extra body.”
- “It’s becoming more common for Copper River gillnetters to also seine, longline, etc...especially for the younger generation.”

## 2. Notes from JP:

JP’s comments went directly into the on-line Google Docs because that is where she read the portraits. One of her primary concerns was how the “portraits” are decipherable as individuals because some of the characteristics are so “obvious”—my main response to that concern is that they are not obvious to a reader who is not close/ familiar to the community.

## 3. Notes from TL:

- TL notes are mostly related to “Last Name with the Most Permits”
- Introductory commentary: *“Hi Emilie, NAME REMOVED here. I made a few edits in red changing of red of the inaccuracies that I noticed. I also highlighted one area that I believe is untrue. The Flats are much more dangerous than the sound, with bar crossing, big surf, high winds, and open ocean. When we lose a fisherman or boat it is almost*

*always on the flats. Thanks let me know what you think. Overall I like what you have and it sounds accurate minus a couple things I noted. Thanks for letting me read it.”*

- Most of what TL provided were direct editing suggestions that are not going to be changed because they are relative to what the original speaker said/ stated/ spoke rather than the formality of changing to accurate grammar.

#### **4. Notes from AL:**

- AL provided a direct written response to “Raise the Bar”:

*“(Identifying names removed) we bought into the gill net fishery over a decade ago.*

*When I think of our first couple of years in the fleet what stands out are the Cordovans, especially the ones that were our age. We were in our early twenties, just starting out and most of our peer group had been running their own shows for ten years already. They were experienced, salty, and proud. Being from out of town and especially being from gulp, Homer, we experienced some localism. Largely we were just ignored and unacknowledged. People still remembered that it was a fisherman from Homer that broke a strike over fish prices in the eighty’s. It took a while to prove that we could hack it, that we could catch our share of the fish and not be assholes. I remember making a set inside the bar and having a boat scream over to us and tell us to pick up and get out, that was grandpa’s set. I remember thinking hadn’t this grandpa passed away? Was this set still his? Apparently so. We kept our heads down, fished hard, learned, and tried to be respectful of the locals. Eventually we earned a chin shift or a wave from a local and still today those little things can feel like a big deal. Reading this piece has made me eager to head to the fishing grounds and be back*

*in Cordova for the summer. I miss the community, where sweatpants and Grundens are acceptable anywhere and everything revolves around the Harbor. Cordova has changed, the fleet is more diverse, but just as this portrait portrays, it's a special place that still takes care of its own."*

## **5. Notes from SS and PS:**

I met with SS and PS together in a local Homer restaurant for about an hour on March 8, 2019. I provided the two reviewers with the same pieces, "Raise the Bar," "Salmon is Just Fish," "Miss Emily" and "Fish Mom." What occurred with them when we met in person and discussed the pieces orally was much different than the reviewer experiences described previously. Both respondent's personalities stood out dramatically so that the exact wording of what they were saying (such as AL's response) was not something I was as attentive to as the larger demeanor and context of the dialogue occurring between the two of them and the way that they interacted off of each other's commentary.

PS mentioned how much she found herself "filling pieces of the story based on my own experience." We talked about how much that supplemental dimension could strongly influence a reader's interpretation. This lead me to consider the subjective dimension of my personal experience and how that influenced the way I listened to and composed the documents in the first-place and how it may be challenging for me to realize what is missing or what spaces could use more documentation that appear full enough to me already.

The three of us discussed the context of where our discussion of the portraits was taking place. Specifically, as we talked about the various behavioral variations between the Russian Old Believer Fleet, the local residents and the seasonal residents, PS mentioned that, "what I am

willing to say to you here right now is probably very different than what I might say sitting in the Alaskan (*Cordova bar*) having a beer.” In order to avoid too much negative commentary on these members of the fleet, I took it upon myself to also share the difference in what it was like to interview the “Raise the Bar” group with the “Salmon is Just Fish” individual. The first group was much more outgoing (or full of “personality and gusto, to put it nicely,” as PS said, “in order to avoid the word “arrogant”) and open with their expressions than the individual whose interview demeanor was much more formal and reserved.

Speaking in person, rather than obtaining a written response from these two, tended to make the conversation somewhat irregular--commentary occurred in quick spurts and at times the two fed off each other, at times they did not. One feature I noticed between the two of them was the continued use of place names, I heard about congestion in “Main Bay” or what it was like to be at Montague Island. We talked about how 2018 (a year when I did not collect direct interviews from Cordova residents) was a year with substantially low fishing time on the Copper River flats and how that pertained to some of the decision-making processes that lead the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to regulate the flats that way. This provoked discussion of some of the up-river conditions of “personal use” or “dip-netting” relative to the presumed weak returns. Both of these individuals discussed their opinion of the fleet’s “belief in management as well as in the role of peer-pressure among the fishermen. In other words, we’re going to balance each other--the fleet is not always totally competitive. We know there needs to be leeway with how much we can harvest.”

Other topics that we discussed (again, in a fairly shallow or brief manner, but still worth noting because they emerged) included: the local perception of topics such as history, tradition and lineage, transitions in the seine fleet in age (“the fleet is less gray than it used to be”), the

general state of the Cordova Harbor (where the deepest sections are, the types of boats that can maneuver carefully within the harbor, how it compares to necessary dredging in Homer, Seward and Kodiak) and finally, the “sporty” dimension of the industry (PS mentioned particular terms: team dimensions, camaraderie, rivalry).



Appendix E: Original Transcript for “Salmon is Just Fish: The Last Name with the Most Permits”

**8/30/2012**

**24TR**

**Russian Old Believer from Homer, AK**

E: This is interview #24 and we’re down at the Gear Shed today. I think we’ll just get started with the questions; we don’t have a lot of time. So, what commercial fisheries do you work in each year?

24: I do salmon gill-netting in PWS and I do long-lining grey cod in PWS in early February. I fish halibut in PWS in August and sometimes in September. Then, I fish grey cod in January. Not this year but I usually do. That’s about it!

E: So it sounds like pretty much all year?

24: Yeah, laughs.

E: Which fishery is the most important to you?

24: The drift gill-netting.

E: So, salmon. Why is that?

24: That’s the longest—well we do it for 4 months out of the year versus grey cod and halibut. It’s maybe 2 months of halibut and 2 months of grey cod. So, most of my income comes from PWS gill-netting.

E: How long have you been fishing there? When did you start fishing there?

24: I've been fishing there since (counting quietly in the background)...eleven years now!

E: How old were you when you started?

24: Since I was 16 years old.

E: Were you fishing with your family?

24: Well, I actually started fishing when I was 12 years old as a deckhand with my dad. At 16 I was running my own bow-picker.

E: So, your father has a boat in the fishery also?

24: My father is in the fishery and I have four more brothers who do PWS gill-netting also.

E: Other family, too?

24: Yeah. Uncles, cousins...

E: I was looking today at the list that Doug Bowen gave me of all the guys that I should try to get ahold of and I noticed there are 37 R's (full last name removed) in the fishery. (He laughs) It sounds like it's probably the largest family out there! How does that impact the way that you guys fish, having a big family out there?

24: It helps. You know, that way we always know where to fish at because we got a lot of people out there. It really helps. Having a big family out there. Just in case something happens you got family to help you out...it's very nice.

E: How would you describe the Copper River commercial fishery to someone who's never experienced it? How does it work out there? What is the season like? (lots of pauses in the sub-questions)

24: Well, it really depends...some people you would talk to would say it's an easy job but that always matters with the weather. You're always out in the ocean. Some days, when it's nice...when it's flat calm weather it's nice and sunny and you can almost say it's an easy job but, of course, in the spring time our first period there—it's always windy and it gets up to 35 or 40 knots and it can be very dangerous out there, you know...(cell phone rings, he apologizes and turns it off). Someone asks how it is; you can say it has ups and downs. If you're not scared of bad weather and you're not scared of the big waves (laughs), well, it's not bad. Go for it!

E: Can you show me what some of the key places are where you fish out there?

24: At the beginning of the season, our fishery starts May 15 or 16<sup>s</sup>, and this is the area we fish—right outside these islands. And more towards July, we go fish chum in the Ester Island area.

MS 8/30/12: *“A lot of guys from Anchorage, Seward, Whittier, and Russians—a lot of the Cordova guys only fish reds because they're snobs and won't leave. But you see all the Russian guys blasting back and forth across the Sound because they're families are in Cordova.”*

E: It sounds like not everybody does the fishery on that side of the Sound?

24: Not everybody. A lot of guys just stay here (Cordova) the whole season. That's one nice thing about Prince William Sound, we have a huge fleet and we can split up. Some guys can go fish chum and then we have another sockeye run on the Caloris (?) Island here. Main Bay Hatchery. We have a sockeye run here, a chum run here and a king and sockeye too. So, we can kind of split up our fleet and some guys can even fish chum in that Chalmers area—they just opened that up a couple years ago.

E: I usually end up telling people that my father, my brother and my husband all have seiners in the Sound but I really only know a little about the seine fleet; not the drift-fleet. Do these islands have names at all?

24: Egg Island, Grass Islands, Kokenheni, the Kenheni bar...they all have names.

E: Are any of those places more or less challenging than others?

24: Yeah, well, basically the further you go, you can almost say that the more dangerous it is because if you're fishing close by Cordova—once the wind starts blowin' you just go into port. Out here? It's a different story—you're all the way out here!

E: How long does it take for you to get back?

24: From Cordova all the way to the farthest island is probably about 3 hours. That's on a fast boat. That's going like 30 MPH. Which, most of the fleet is converting to faster, updated boats then what my dad had 15 or 20 years ago. Back in the day, they just had boats that went 8 or 9 MPH. Right now everybody is converting to faster and more convenient boats. About 3 hours to that furthest island. On the boats that they used to fish, it could take almost 7 hours! Laughs.

E: So who fishes in this fishery? What are some of the details of the fleet identity? It looks like there are about 700 permits? Is it diverse?

24: Which communities?

E: What would you say about the fleet? How diverse is the fleet?

24: Most of the fleet is the Cordova locals—they've been around there so they just pass on their permits to their kids or nieces or nephews. Then, the last 10 years, I've noticed that a lot of people to Homer switched over to that area because of the bad seasons they had in the Cook Inlet. So, I have 3 or 5 uncles and maybe 10 cousins that used to fish in Cook Inlet but they switched to this area because of the bad seasons.

E: Did you notice people selling their permits for Cook Inlet or are they keeping access to that fishery, also?

24: Well, they just hold on to them. I mean some guys sell but most guys hold on to them—in case it gets better. Like right now, things are kind of picking up here!

E: Last summer (2011) was good?

24: Yeah. If things get slow in the Cordova area then they'll come back here, come back to this area.

E: Would you be more or less content to fish somewhere else if you could? If you had access to another permit? Really, anywhere in the state: South East, Cook Inlet, Bristol Bay?

24: No. I've been fishing in this area since I was a kid and I'm very familiar with the area. Most of my friends and family are here. I don't think I'd be able to go somewhere else. Maybe for curiosity, I wouldn't mind trying a different area but as far as if I had a choice to switch today? No, I probably wouldn't.

E: Do you see any challenges with fleet relationships or challenges or particular relationships that are better or worse than others?

24: Not really. I don't see it that way. I think we're just...we just go out together. There are always guys who say they hate this guy or that guy but out of the community...I don't see many differences. To me, a fisherman is a fisherman.

E: What about age differences? Any that you've noticed anything between the younger and older? It sounds like you're probably part of the younger fleet?

24: When I started running a boat at 16, there was a lot of talk in town that there were such young kids—it was me and my two friends—their dads were fishing too. When my dad bought me a permit, their dad's bought permits too and we all started fishing. There were only three of us who were 16 at that time. It was big thing. We were very, very young but right now—I see a lot of young kids. It looks like their dad's retire. Young kids just retire and start fishing; it is a nice thing. Compared to 10 years ago? There weren't that many young guys running boats—it was all older, or at least people who were 25-30 years old.

E: So, what changed? Why are there more younger people now?

24: I think it was because of updated machinery—it's easier to run a boat than it used to be. Back in the day, stuff wasn't that updated! They didn't have updated GPS that can tell you exactly where you're at and radars. Back when dad started fishing, all they had was compasses and stuff like that. That's one of the things that really got the younger in. Technology and better fishing equipment. And, another thing! The fishery got way better in the Ester area—it's a safe place to fish because it's very calm weather out there. You're covered by islands. Out in the flats—it's open oceans out here! I see a lot of the younger kids just wait until June and then fish here (Ester) and that's the only fishery they do! But me, I try to stay and fish silvers and stay in the Sound until the middle of September, you know!

E: I've heard more people here in Homer talk about using fishing areas all over the Sound and a lot of the Cordova fleet, especially the older guys, it sounds like they're less likely to do that...

24: Yeah, they don't like running around. They have their homes, their families right there. So, they don't run around. They just go out do their fishery, they're happy as long as they're home for the weekend versus the guys who over here—it's a long drive to get back to Cordova—so once they leave that area they'll stay over on the other side for a month or month and a half. The nearest port is Whittier if you have to go get groceries...

E: So, you're actually pretty close to Anchorage!

24: Yeah.

E: Do you have family that comes with you for the summer?

24: Yeah, we bring our travel trailer and my wife and my one daughter they stay in the trailer.

E: For the whole summer? Do they like it?

24: Yeah, they like it! Some summers there is a lot of rain and my wife gets tired of rain...but other than that, she likes being out there! They're camping the whole summer.

E: I'm kind of hoping when I get to Cordova in the summer I can meet with some of the families so I can talk to the women who are there in the summer.

24: Most of them do stay in one trailer park there! If you come down, you'll have a dozen women to talk to!

E: What are some of the biggest historic transitions? You've talked a little about changes in technology but what other historic things have changed how the fleet operates?

24: Well, there are the hatcheries now! Compared to how it used to be...

E: When you say, "used to be," are you talking about 50's? 60's?

24: No, the 70's and 80's when my dad started fishing. The chum fishery wasn't really a big thing because of the prices and so not a lot of fishermen would go out. They'd rather go out and catch the wild sockeye and get the top dollar instead of going to catch the hatchery fish. But, right now, the prices really went up on the chums. So, that's something that's really different from 20 years ago. And, other than that, it has ups and downs, good seasons and bad seasons but it kind of stays the same.

E: What about big events—like the 64 earthquake as something that changed the landscape a little bit? It changed the sand bars, for example.



24: I'm sure it did. I haven't really talked to anyone about that. My dad wasn't around then.

E: What about changes with other species in the Sound and I've heard people talk about the decline of herring?

24: Well, the herring. I think the Exxon Valdez was the big thing.

E: Do you think that had much impact on the salmon fishery?

24: Yeah, it did! It did! For quite a few years. But most of it was the herring fishing. But, the herring fishing was a big thing, a big impact. Those were the days right when the herring showed up and the crash happened right here (points to map).

E: Did you ever fish herring?

24: No. It was mostly the seiners. My dad or my family never did seining.

E: So, what boats do you use the rest of the year if not your drift-boat?

24: We have a big long-lining boat—a 48 footer.

E: Is it yours?

24: No, it's my dad's. We use it as a family boat.

E: A few things I wanted to mention because I did find so many family permit holders with your name: Do you notice much of a separation between the Homer Russian fleet and the Cordova

fleet? Like, just in terms of how you're using the harbor, you mentioned family staying there—are those features noticeable or not really?

24: Not really.

E: We talked a little about how family dynamics influence fisheries—I'm interested in that, too?

24: No real comments....Interview kind of winds down.

“Gill-netting is gill-netting—it all works the same.”

E: One more: you mentioned that normally you would be cod fishing right now but you're doing something else?

24: I'm working on boats! We're building new boats and refurbishing one.

E: Who do you work for?

24: I work for myself.

E: Where do you work?

24: Right by the Bay Club—there's an automotive shop and we have one of those shops there.

RECORDER TURNED OFF

Appendix F: Original Transcript for When the Oil Spilled

**3/28/2013**

**09KW**

**Owner of the Cordova bookstore**

E: Do you consider Cordova your home?

KW: Yep.

E: How long have you been here?

25 years.

E: What brought you up or down here?

Well, kind of a long story. But, in short. (Radio is on in the background). In short, my wife and I were ocean kayak guides in Prince William Sound before we came here in 1987. And, we spent all summer out in the Sound from the beginning of May until the end of September every year and in the fall, we'd work at home doing graphic art and fine art of our own.

E: Where were you living?

Anchorage. I also taught x-country skiing for the municipality of Anchorage—there was a new ski school. But, in the mid-80's there was kind of a downturn in the oil economy—which is kind of hard to believe. But, the state is very tied to the oil industry, currently, and has been for many years. So, it was kind of a case of a “falling tide, lowers all vessel.” People were losing money even though they weren't directly connected to the oil industry. People were leaving the state—

they were walking away from mortgages because they couldn't find buyers. We weren't directly involved—just small contracts, doing fine art out of our home. But, we got a lot of our jobs from ad agencies who had lots of work and weren't staffed to take care of it all so they would contract it out to people like us. And, they weren't getting the work so neither were we. So, we'd come to Cordova many times to see the bird migration here. We'd always admired the place. When the bookstore came available—and we thought, if we moved to Cordova—because their economy was based on fish, you know? We wouldn't be affected by the rest of the state's woes and downturns, the oil industry. If we move here, we'll be unaffected by adverse oil impacts. So, we moved here in 1987—two years before the EVOS. Kind of ironic. Laughs.

E: That didn't stop you from leaving?

No, we stayed.

E: How do you find Cordova compared to other communities of similar size—Kodiak, Homer, Seward, Valdez, maybe some of the SE communities.

I like it here a lot. I have kind of a theory about the place. I used to be a submarine sailor during the cold war back in the 60's and we would often stay submerged—with missile firing submarines for like 3 months—87 consecutive days is my personal record. I used to think we were all kind of super normal to be confined like that and get along for a long period of time. Then, I realized, after awhile that we're not normal at all. We're all kind of flippy! Just flippy in the same direction. That's kind of what it's like here. It's not a village but it is remote—it takes awhile to get here. The demographics are such that—my little book store works, I mean Barnes and Noble can't compete with me in this town. It's too small. Other

franchises—McDonald's, Subway—all that. Can't compete. The demographics aren't such that the economy of scale would work for them. It's all pretty much "mom and pop" around here. The fishermen fish for themselves, they don't fish in fleets. Really there is nothing to keep you here. It's remote. It rains a lot. 150 inches of rain/ year. It's dark a lot. There's no malls—blah, blah, blah, whatever. There's no icons of American modern culture. You can't really be ambivalent—do I like this place or not? You really know one way or the other. If you don't like it—there's nothing to keep you here. So you leave. It's not like Valdez where you might be taken up by the oil industry to work from Louisiana or Oklahoma—where you think the real world is and you hate the place. You just hate it and you can't wait to get out of this Godforsaken place and get back to the real world, you know? You hear that a lot in Valdez. You never hear it here. Never. For whatever goofy reason that people like it here—they do. Because if you don't? You're gone. Basically, it's a town for people who like being here. It's very pleasant.

E: You do think that's true across about all age groups?

No. Children and kids, they always want to get out...It's not like I was born here. I came here by choice.

E: Have you noticed that a lot of young people do move back?

Um, some do. Some don't. Certainly not where I was born and grew up.

E: Where was that?

California. I was born in California. In a way, there are a lot of positive ways—it's a gated community. There are no roads. We can't get busloads of people coming in. It's too shallow. No cruise ships. We haven't got those kinds.

E: So, if there were going to be cruise ships—where could they go?

They can't dock. It's too shallow. They would have to lighter out. They would have to anchor out and lighter in. There was a small cruise ship—maybe 500 people—that came for about 2 years. It was really bad fit. Nobody liked it. We didn't care for the people; they didn't care for us. Most people on cruise ships are looking for shopping experiences between Vancouver and Seward. We don't have ivory and jade and gold. Furs. And totem poles and Sourdoughs reciting Robert Service. A lot of these places kind of turn into caricatures of themselves and so. In the winter time, they just close up. Here—is a real working town! Folks come in and ask what we do in the wintertime? Well, Hello? Do you think we're just here to serve you as you pass through in the summer? We don't stay that, of course. We've been to other places where that is the case. We don't depend on tourism here. We have independent travelers—but—not very many! You're limited but it's like a gated community. You can come on the ferry boat or you can come on the plane. Only so many at a time. Only so many per day. And, your name is on a list somewhere and you've probably been through security before you got here.

E: What about the fishermen who aren't from here? They come on their own boats and then the seasonal cannery workers?

Mostly they are limited entry permit. You have to own the permit. So, the people who come who don't live here are what you call seasonal residents—it's the same people every year. They

just don't live here through the winter for whatever winter. They do something else in the winter. Fishermen here—have what you might call a diversified portfolio—maybe they have a salmon permit, their halibut permit, cod—or they might fish Bristol Bay as well as this area. So, if one fishery is not really killing them than another one might be. They're never going to totally crash. They don't have all their eggs in one basket. But, some people don't do that. It's the same people who come back every year. It's kind of nice.

E: So, you can recognize who they are...

Yeah. It's not really a transient place—if you just show up and walk the docks to try to get a job on a boat? Good luck! They don't want somebody who doesn't know anything! They want somebody who knows how to fish, knows boats, knows port from starboard. All that stuff. Someone who knows powerblocks and hydraulics. Whatever.

E: I feel that I see more signs posted here than I do in Homer or in Sitka that say “looking for a job on a commercial fishing boat.” Why do you think there are more here?

This is a big fishing port. It's a big port in the state. There is a lot of work—but you can't take people off the street. They really, really don't. There's liability. You know?

E: I think—I keep hearing that the last few years have been good years and it's getting harder to find jobs.

Yeah, you have to work really hard—the economy here is based on fish! It's a renewable resource and it's responsibly managed—other places depend on tourism or oil. Or, some other kind of artificial base of their economy—they have to deal with a lot more fluctuation than we

do. Our basic product is food. So, in the past recession, for example, in the lower 48? We weren't affected here. At all. Except for the EVOS—we weren't really affected very much either by anything in the oil industry.

E: What do you think are the lasting impacts of that spill on the community? I know that was 20 years ago.

December 24, 1989.

E: No, not December it was March.

Right, March. It was Good Friday.

E: Right.

Good Friday hasn't been very good to us here in Alaska. There was the big earthquake in 1964. That was Good Friday.

E: Would you say that there has been some recovery in the community sense then?

*Response is just a sigh, a little hesitant to answer.*

E: Are there lasting impacts?

Well, I got this little scar here. Probably in 1972—I got it rock climbing. It's still there. It will be there until I die. It's just a little reminder of an event that happened a long time ago. That's just the way it is. It's not going to go away. I live with it. It doesn't hurt. It's not disfiguring.

But, there it is. It's the same thing with the EVOS. People were affected in direct proportion to the amount of connection they had with the Sound. A lot of people who had no connection to the



Sound thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread! They could make a lot of money, they didn't really care about this place. In Valdez, people were toasting Joe Hazelwood in the bars because they brought so much money to so many people. That wasn't the case here. The villages were more severely affected—because of literal subsistence and natural resource. Lower cash economy. Here, that's not the case—we're somewhere between village life and mainstream American monoculture. We fish but don't just eat fish. We sell it. But, we depend on a healthy environment for living—just like the Native people did. Everybody here was very seriously affected—not just economically but also sociologically, psychologically. Psychically. Commercial fishermen are really kind, of unnecessary in an economic way. You know where these salmon are going—they're going up river. You could put a weir across the Copper River and let exactly the right amount go up so that they have for next year. And, then pass it out to people....(convoluted, some discussion about salmon out in the ocean).

That really gives no reward for hard work or good seamanship or good weather knowledge or good fish sense or good boat maintenance—there's no reward for that if you just pass the fish out. The people who do this—you know, in the book store, I'm not in this for the money. I didn't want to make money—I just thought this would be a great job to have. It's the same thing with fish. I think people do it more for the virtue inherent in the activity instead of the money they make.

E: Are you talking about fishing on a larger scale? Including other species? Other locations? Gear types? Or just this area?

Well, the fishermen here mostly fish...well, the big boats here are seine boats and maybe they have 5 people—but most people are single individuals on gill-netters, little bow pickers so it's very small scale.

For those people, it's a lot different than factory fishing—like big trawlers or crabbing. It's a different thing. It's more money oriented or corporate oriented. Here it's just local people.

Pretty much, gill-netting. Think of economy of scale such that it couldn't attract big factory operations. Plus, limited entry—there's only so many. So, the population doesn't really change here—there's only so many fish, only so many fishermen for limited entry permits. Only so many groceries or fuel. Or mending their nets or Xtratufs, Grundens, whatever. Growth is just not going to happen. As long as the fishery is well managed. It's been like this since the railroad went away. Pretty much the same population in 1937.

E: I'll have to look at that!

Yeah, before that (1937) it wasn't a fishery at all. When the copper went away, the copper companies left behind all the workers. The workers didn't get rich, but really wanted to. Everyone who was in Alaska at that time wasn't here for quality of life. They were here to make a lot of money and live the life they were accustomed to. That didn't happen. So, when the railroad went away—pretty much everybody wanted to convert the old railway bed to a highway. Because they thought, “well, shit, tourists like this scenery stuff. So, maybe they'll come down the same the corridor and bring the same wealth that the copper industry used to.” But, it didn't happen. For a number of reasons. The railway went away in '37. And the oil and gas had a big war that involved the most of the world. Resources were diverted to that activity. But, following the war when there was a lot of prosperity—they started thinking about

it again. A lot of the people who had lived here, the boomers, had died or moved away.

Attrition. The people who took their place, didn't come to take their place because that wasn't going to happen. They just liked it here, or they wanted to fish. Commercial fishing was great, there was lots of fish, blah, blah, blah. It went through a lot of different processes. A lot of people made a run at building the Copper River Highway. Which would have been a whole thing! It would have opened the entire river to sport fishermen? Those numbers are not limited, really. If you want to go sport fishing, you can just go to the grocery store and get a permit and catch fish. It's not as regulated as commercial fishing which is limited.